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未踏召喚：ブラッドサイン
The unexplored summon://blood sign VII
鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希
電撃文庫

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Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 07

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STORY

神を超える存在にして、最強最悪の未踏級『白き女王』。召喚儀礼や被召物……規定級、神格級、『大三角』含む未踏級の全てを駆使しても、滅ぼすことはできないはずだ。しかし城山恭介は為さねばならない。

——滅ぼせないなら逆に、創るまでだ。『白き女王』を完膚なきまで滅す、新しい『法則』を!!

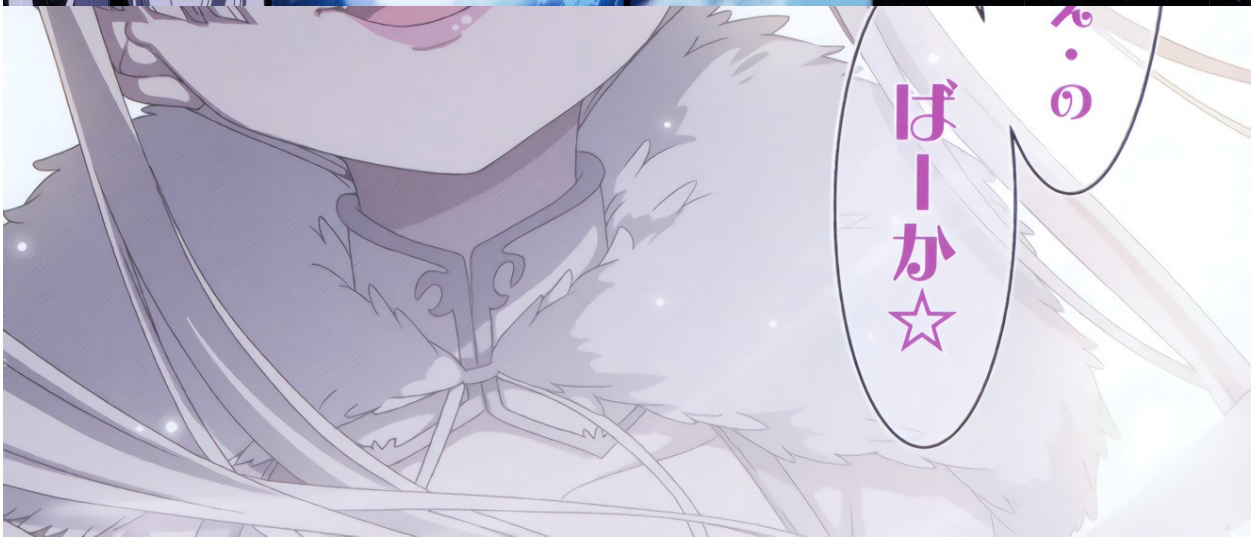
鍵を握るのは、冥乃河葵。最古の人造依代である彼女が抱える叡智を紐解けば、新しいルールで創り上げたオリジナルの未踏級を降臨させる触媒に手が届く。復讐鬼ビヨンデッタとも手を組んだ恭介は、葵と接見するため、冥乃河神社へと足を運ぶ。そこで敵として立ちはだかったのは、恭介が過去救ったはずの依代の少女で……!?

寝たふりを
しているのが
バレバレな訳だが
……チッ
魔が差して
お姉ちゃんの唇でも
狙ってくれれば
馬鹿笑いできたのに
ギュー
お客様
朝食の準備が
できました
まったく……
ここまで
揃えておいて
シリアルが
ないだなんて
おめーは
地球最後の日でも
それ食って
死ぬ気ですか？
ビヨンデッタ
「フリーダム」アワード920の
召喚師「仇染め（ライアーキャット）」。
恭介の宿敵。しかし現在は
「白き女王」撃破を目的として共闘中。

あんなに綺麗で
すごくて
強くて
優しくて
格好良い存在の
素晴らしさが
分からないのは
きっとお兄ちゃんが
『白き女王』を
まだまだ知らないからに
決まっているもの
お兄ちゃんが
いけないんだよ
『白き女王』を
倒そうだなんて

オリヴィアぁぁ
ぁぁあああああああ
あああああアアっ!!!
ドクトルS
謎の召喚師。
依代・オリヴィアと
コンビを組む。
さあ始めましょ
お兄ちゃん？
『白き女王』の
イイところ
いっぱいいっぱい
いーっぱい
見せてあげる
からっ!!
オリヴィア＝ハイランド
恭介がかつて救った少女の一人。
しかし彼女は、「白き女王」信奉集団
「ブライズメイド」として現れた。

『白き女王』は
普通の方法では倒せない
ならば
創り出すしかない
第三の召喚儀礼の
理から外れた
『白き女王』を
完全殺害するためだけの
新たな被召物を――
召喚儀礼を束ね導く『大三角』の
『黄』の鰓はためきし天空を統べる精霊』を
介し血の盟約を結ぶ――
冥乃河 葵[めいのかわ・あおい]
人類で唯一完全人工物である
浄瑠璃方式の依代、その最古の個体。
「白き女王」打倒の切り札。

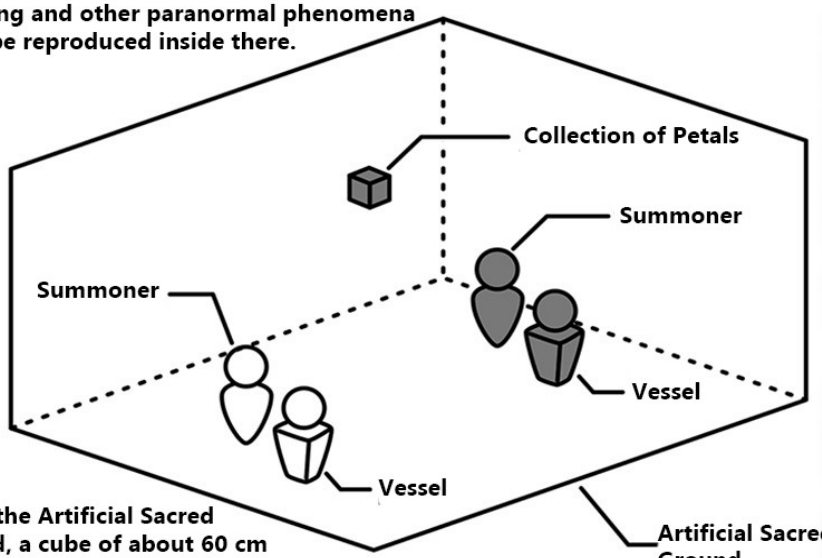

ばーか☆

Battle Tutorial

The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.

phase 1

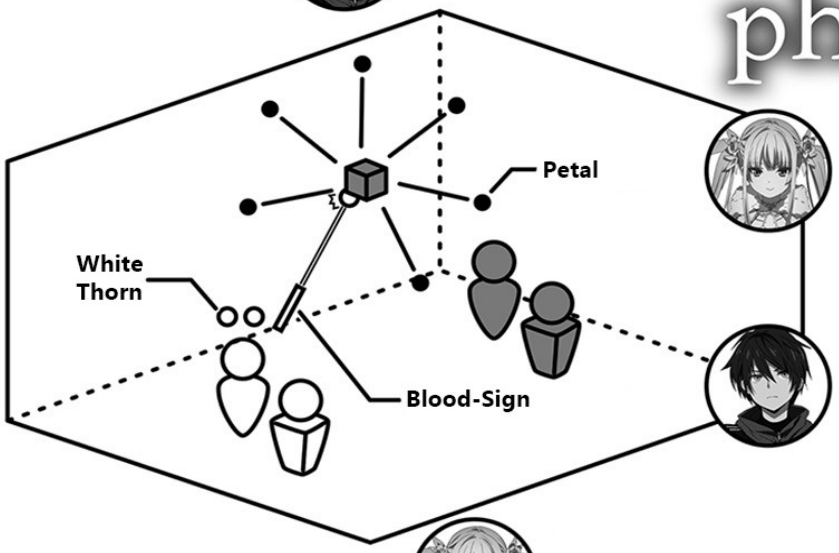
When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.



Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.

It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

phase 2



3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.

You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.

What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.

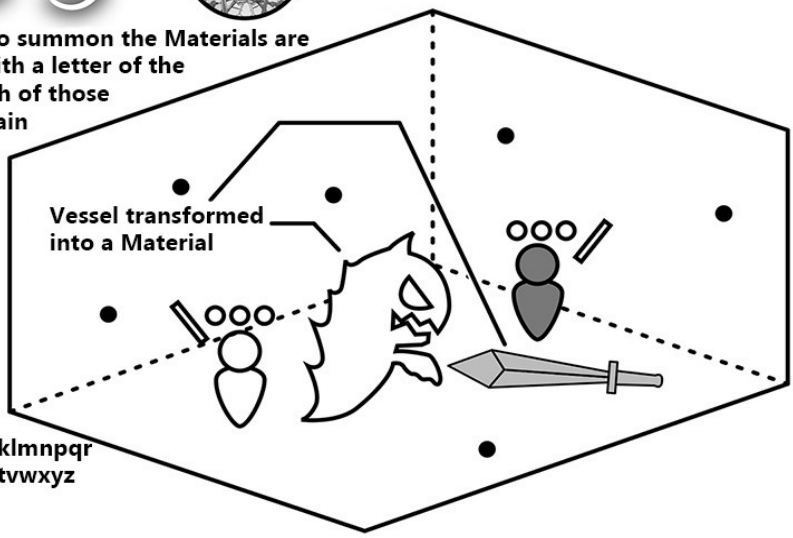
And the vessel's body is used to create...

Battle Tutorial of "The unexplored summon://blood-sign"

phase 3

...a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.

The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.



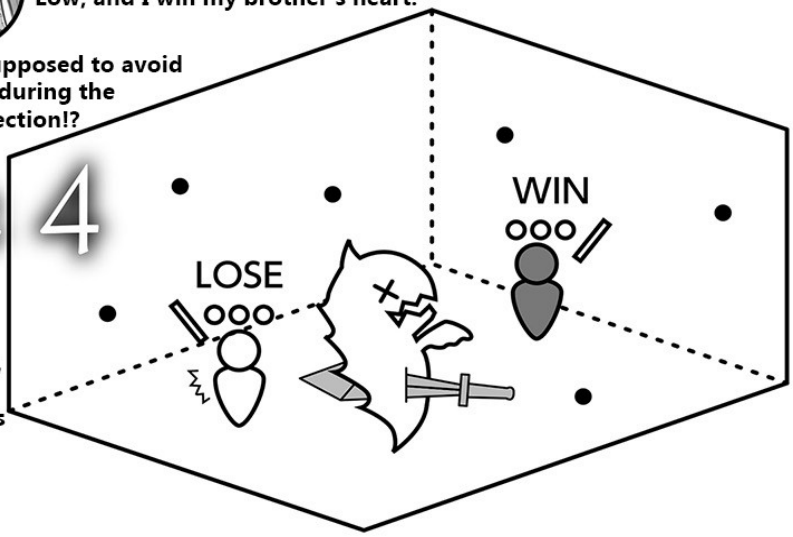
aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.

Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.

Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

phase 4



And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.

The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.

The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.

And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000...hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Phase 1
Upper Cube: Collection of Petals
Left Dark Figure: Summoner
Right Dark Figure: Vessel
Left White Figure: Summoner
Right White Figure: Vessel
Overall Box: Artificial Sacred Ground

K: The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.
Q: When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.
Q: Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.
K: It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

Phase 2
Dark Ball: Petal
White Ball: White Thorn
White Stick: Blood-Sign

Q: 3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.
K: You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Q: What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.
K: And the vessel's body is used to create…

Phase 3
White Monster and Dark Sword: Vessel transformed into a Material

Q: …a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.
K: The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.
Q: aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

K: There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.
Q: Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.
K: Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

Phase 4
K: And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.
Q: The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.
K: The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.
Q: And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000…hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Prologue

I've started things on a friendlier note this time. Heh hehn. You actually have some hope, don't you? Yes, hope for love and comedy!! As long as you ask for it, I will become your servant and supply you with an unending reign as the unparalleled strongest who enjoys lovey-dovey night-long battles with the ultimate, perfect, and flawless wife who will play the *boke* or the *tsukkomi* and who will look down on you or up at you!! …You may have forgotten after getting so focused on the battling, but please keep in mind that *that option* is always right there in front of you, brother.

Now, you seem to be sneaking around working on something right now. Hee hee hee. I am wholeheartedly cheering for you in the hopes that this will carry you up to me at the peak.

Yes, in this alone you can know I am telling the truth.

But, brother, what exactly is victory?

I am unmistakably the strongest and indisputably invincible. …But when you think about it, I do not always achieve victory or success.

That is simply because the strongest can be proven by ranking everyone based on their quantifiable power, but the conditions for victory and success are constantly in flux depending on the current situation.

Brother, can you picture yourself achieving victory or success?

Can you envision a blade piercing my chest or chopping off my head?

But as I said, the conditions for victory and success are constantly in flux. That is true for you, for me, and for all of the other worthless humans and Materials.

By the way, I mentioned that victory and success are in flux, but what kind of "pressure" is it that causes that axis to shift?

…Might *that* be even more ugly and horrific than me since I am simply the strongest and I have a clear and defined position as an unmatched being?

Facts

- Someone will always achieve victory. But there is no guarantee that the victor will achieve the success they wanted.

Opening X-01: Aimless Trip to an Unmanned Station (With Nowhere to Stay)

“Biondetta, where are we spending the night?”
“What?”

(Opening X-01 Open 07/19 01:32)
Aimless Trip to an Unmanned Station (With Nowhere to Stay)

Their objective was to gather all the necessary cards.
They would truly kill the White Queen. And if the means did not exist in this world, they would create it themselves.

Pale yellow and green lights hung over a soft and tranquil darkness that seemed left behind by the times. The night breeze silently flowed from the blades of grass to the trees buried in the darkness. The light came from the fireflies which had become an endangered species in modern times. After passing over a small stream so clear it looked like you could scoop the water up and drink it, a gentle breeze coolly swept away the midsummer heat and provided the same refreshing feelings felt when peering into the depths of a crystal.
It was July 19, Marine Day. It was 1:32 AM.
“Oh, give me a break…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke, a black-haired boy wearing a red hoodie and sports brand track suit pants, was complaining for once.
The rural unmanned train station was entirely deserted. The sign above his head said “Houbi Village Station” and was covered with cobwebs. The fluorescent lights above switched on and off with a timer and the cracked platform did not have any benches, vending machines, or even fences. The boy sat directly on the platform and wiped the sweat from his brow.
He did not even bother hiding his Repliglass Blood-Sign known as Phosphorous, so he rested it on his shoulder.
“We screwed up… That was an entirely meaningless battle! I can’t believe this. I knew we should’ve used my cruiser instead of the trains. We could’ve just traveled along the coast…”
“Eh? What are you talking about, sir?”
Someone else put her hands on her miniskirted hips next to Kyousuke. She had pink hair and a sexy body that she readily showed off with a combination of a waitress uniform, demon horns, and a demon tail. She too

was a summoner: Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. She was a survivor of the Fifteen Siblings Project which had developed into a true hell thanks to its close connection to the Queen. Perhaps because the Summoning Ceremony rules said any who reached Award 1000 would become a resident of the other world, she had already taken a step toward becoming a legend herself.
Her named was Biondetta Shiroyama.
A lot could be said about her (a lot of it bad), but she was the insane woman who called herself Kyousuke's *big sister*.
She tilted her head with her travel bags set down on either side of her feet.
"We're about to start some delicate work, so isn't it actually to our benefit to have taken out these inevitable enemies sooner rather than later?"
Kyousuke grimaced as he watched her white snake vessel poke its head out from between her large breasts and crawl around the beautiful demon's body.
"I had completely forgotten how much of a battle-crazed revenge-fetishist *you* are, Biondetta. I should have known this would happen if I let you plan out our trip. *You intentionally planned it so we would run into the enemy, didn't you!?*"
"Well, my goal is to allow my client to enjoy their revenge even more than they had hoped☆"
Kyousuke slapped his hand against his face.
He wanted to forget all about that battle inside the enclosed and moving space of the train. Whether or not he had won in the end was not the issue here.
"…Information on our movements will have gotten back to the enemy's main unit."
"Yes, of course."
"Bridesmaid will know I don't have a contract with a vessel right now and thus can't use the Summoning Ceremony!"
"Oh? But isn't a revenge story so much more exciting if you start off at a disadvantage?"
Her way of thinking was simply too different.
To Biondetta, a battle with your life on the line was a form of entertainment. What was the most logical and efficient means of reducing damage to your allies and neutralizing your enemy? *From the bottom of her heart, she simply did not care.* How could she draw out the most emotion from the deadly battles? How could she enjoy each and every dramatic battle to its fullest? She did not care if her allies died to accomplish those things.
"Don't – you – worry."
While Kyousuke sat in front of her, Biondetta bent over, pressed her raised index finger against her lips, and emphasized the twin mounds on her chest which already looked like they were going to spill from her top.

“We have two Award 900-level Freedom summoners. In the end, we’ll defeat those summoner units that need support from Repliglass soldiers to function.”
“Well, yes. We can. But…”
Kyousuke shook his hand in front of his annoyed face when presented with that sickly sweet pose that looked as artificial as a sweetener created in a lab.
Why would she go out of her way to get injured when they could settle things without being touched? Even if she could dodge the bullet, she would want to passionately protect you by catching it in the center of her chest.
Kyousuke could only see Biondetta’s actions as a waste of talent.
“Sigh. I guess there’s no use crying over spilt milk.”
“Yes, yes.”
“Just so you know, I’m not letting this go. I will always remember this.”
“Oh? Are you going to confiscate my right to adulthood by spanking me? Yes, an unmanned station without security cameras is such an exciting location! Will someone show up without warning? Will someone see? It’s safer than a park at night, but it provides the same tension of being outside! It’s such a wonderful situation, sir!!”
“I really wish you could leave your perversions behind when you’re traveling for a job, Biondetta!”
However, she was insane, so trying to convince her with a logical argument would be wasted effort. After being caught in that sudden and entirely unnecessary battle (Courtesy of Bridesmaid, Produced by Biondetta), Kyousuke felt as exhausted as someone dragged along to a 3-hour romance movie he had zero interest in. The worst part was that he could only blame himself for deciding he was too busy and thus not double-checking the contents of the travel itinerary Biondetta had put together.
He had gathered all of his travel supplies in a single, compact knapsack which he placed over his right shoulder once more.
“Well, whatever. We managed to arrive at our destination on the last train, so let’s get some rest at our base here. Biondetta, where are we spending the night?”
Revenge Demon Biondetta stood tall, clasped her hands in front of her large chest, and smiled.
And she tilted her head as she smoothly responded.
“What?”
……
……
Unsure what to make of her response, Kyousuke’s mind went blank. His mind boasted calculation speeds surpassing the average supercomputer, but the electric signals traveling through his brain’s synapses got lost on the way to their destinations.
It couldn’t be.
Surely not.

I must be reading too much into this. There's no way the world could be filled with this kind of despair when she *hasn't shown up yet!!* Shiroyama Kyousuke worked to calm his pulse as it pounded in his chest due to his tension and he repeated his question to Biondetta the Frightening Tour Guide.
"Umm, *you* were in charge of everything concerning this trip. Isn't that right, Biondetta?"
"Yes."
"Then it would be *your* job to secure the lodging we need for a base of operations here, right!? It was your insistence that I chose to travel by train and leave my cruiser back in Toy Dream 35! It can be an inn or a hotel…or hell, even a rented room or a tent. Just tell me where we can spend the night!"
"What?"
"It's 1:30 in the morning, we just finished fighting, and we're both exhausted. So why are you only responding with ominous confusioooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooon!? Are you kidding meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!!??? "
Biondetta had a frightening skill for making Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit, Shiroyama Kyousuke lose his cool to this extent. She was the only human with that talent and she only shared it with that hellish twintails who reigned as the strongest of the strongest at the peak of the Unexplored-class.
Meanwhile, the sexy demon waitress sister showed no sign whatsoever of cutely wilting at having angered him with her mistake. In fact, she placed her hands on her flushed cheeks as her back trembled.
She rubbed her inner thighs together within her miniskirt and restlessly wiggled her butt back and forth.
"Yes, yes, it's so dramatic!! Let out all your pent-up frustrations! Now, Kyousuke-chan! Your sexy big sister is right here! Spank me and I'll shriek nice and loud, pinch me and I'll tremble! My plump body is right here waiting for you in this deserted darkness! C'mon, c'mon, c'mon!!"
With a loud click, the timer ran out and the station platform's lights all shut off since the last train for the night had already left.
Solitary Shiroyama Kyousuke was left alone with that utter pervert while it was too dark to see anything at all, so he gave up on thinking and shouted at the top of his lungs.
"Oh, give me a breeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaaaaaaeeeeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaak!!!!!!"
Dawn was still a long way off. Nothing could be as irritating as a waitress who intentionally broke a plate because she wanted to be punished.

Facts

- Kyousuke and Biondetta have left Toy Dream 35 to accomplish some kind of objective. On the way, they seem to have already been caught in a battle with the Queen-worshiping group known as Bridesmaid.
- It is currently 1:32 AM at an unlit and unmanned train station. They have nowhere to spend the night.
- She cannot avoid battles or reserve a place to spend the night, but Biondetta is not incompetent. She is simply supplying the perfect accidents to make the trip more dramatic. But since she seems to think Kyousuke will enjoy this, she may have the more fundamental problem of being an incompetent big sister.

Opening X-02: One-Way Ticket from Strongest to Hell, Unreserved Seat

“But in that case…”
“Yes. When things are going too smoothly, something always intervenes.”

(Opening X-02 Open 07/19 00:33)
One-Way Ticket from Strongest to Hell, Unreserved Seat

They left Toy Dream 35 using the Ultraloop which used the power of permanent magnets to travel through a vacuum tunnel that looked a lot like an oil pipeline. Linear motor trains? What are those? When travelling 1150kph in a world where air resistance and rail friction resistance did not exist, travelling down the archipelago’s backbone to a regional city had been easy enough, but the problem had started with the connections after that.
“How many connections is this now, Biondetta?”
“I know you’re not that stupid, sir. It’s the 5th one☆ We saved a ton of time with the Ultraloop, so we should be able to arrive in just half a day.”
“…”
Midnight had already passed, so it was 12:33 AM of July 19.
After the school’s closing ceremony ended in the morning, they had supposedly left the cruiser he used as a home in the early afternoon with plenty of time to spare, but the next thing he knew, they were surrounded by the late night darkness. They had been making connection after connection between slow trains the entire time. For the first time in Kyousuke’s life, he had eaten station bentos thrice in one day: lunch, dinner, and late night snack. Once you were sick of the scenery, there was nothing else to do, but once you knew the pattern, there was nothing left to surprise you. Kyousuke had once only eaten supplements and gelatin drinks, so he understood that your ticket to life was nearly torn apart once you stopped receiving any stimulation from your food. So this was his conclusion: *Ahh, I miss my cereal and milk…*
And Kyousuke was not going to go easy on someone from the same miniature garden.
“You suck at navigation.”
“Oh, dear. But if we used your cruiser, it would have been a 14-hour trip of staring at the GPS sea chart and fighting the ship’s controls while it rocks in the waves. And a land route is a lot safer than using a passenger ship or airplane, isn’t it? This should be the easiest route for a variety of reasons.”

Biondetta explained all that while smiling and holding a travel bag in each hand. Kyousuke had stuffed everything he needed into the knapsack he wore over his right shoulder and he did not like how much luggage she had with her, but she had refused to say anything but “A beautiful big sister needs a wide variety of supplies☆”
“The final down-train of the Seiryu Line will be leaving soon. This will be the final train. If you need that train, make sure you do not miss it. I repeat…”
And this was truly their final connection.
That announcement could only be heard once a day and it was made in a long, drawn-out fashion.
This route passed through a tunnel in a precipitous mountain region and approached a fishing village on the coast. The 10-car slow train was nearly empty despite being the last train, so it was a mystery how it made any money. The only person inside was a very compact old lady returning home from who-knows-where.
“Sigh.”
Kyousuke breathed a small sigh as he sat in the kind of 4-person box seat never seen in a city train designed for the rush hour crowds. The relaxation effect of the train’s regular shaking could be good and bad. If that was all he had, the poisonous boredom would only accumulate inside him.
Biondetta watched the boy as she sat in the seat across from him, crossed her legs despite her miniskirt, and giggled.
“…What?”
“Nothing. I was just noticing that you let your air of perfection slip when you’re alone with your big sister. Does that mean we’re still close enough for that?”
“…”
“If so…”
A wicked color seeped into her smile.
In the past, the Queen’s Hatred had taken root in her soul and it made an appearance here.
“Then just how deep is your bond with the one and only being who can get you to expose your true self without worrying about who might be watching? It makes me jealous, Kyousuke-chan.”
He could almost hear the cracks running through the solidified atmosphere. If his gaze had produced pressure, he might have broken through the reflection of his face in the train window.
“Biondetta.”
“Yes, sir?”
“…Let’s use this chance to review.”
He intentionally changed the subject.
If he did not distract himself somehow, static threatened to fill his vision from the outer edges.
“The White Queen can’t be defeated by normal means. Not even if we check through every last one of the Regulation-class, Divine-class, and

Unexplored-class including the Three. And of course, challenging her without using the Summoning Ceremony or a Material is even more out of the question. That would simply be suicide."
"Yes."
"But at the same time, the Regulation-class was artificially embedded in that world as a foothold for humans to reach the more obvious Divine-class and Unexplored-class. *That means Materials can be created.* Everything in the three-way stalemate between the low, middle, and high sound ranges may have succumbed to the White Queen, but there still aren't any Materials that use the vowels of the lowest sound range. If we can create an Unexplored-class from that nonexistent sound range, we might be able to embed a new law in that world. And that will act as a rule letting us kill the White Queen."
The last train finally began to move.
Everything continued as before. He had supposedly had enough of the slow trains and he was supposedly sick of their regular shaking, but it gradually soothed his irritable mood.
Biondetta pushed up on the window to open it, letting in a chilly wind that had not been poisoned by a heat island. It was a small thing, but it was a luxury not found in the air-conditioned city trains with unopenable windows or the Ultraloop that ran through a vacuum tunnel.
"But that is easier said than done, isn't it? I mean, the Unexplored-class is made up of the very rules that govern the world of the gods. Humans creating and embedding a new one is the greatest form of arrogance."
"Probably so," he agreed. "I'm talking about something similar to messing with the entire system that divides the world's gods into categories such as mother goddesses or destruction gods. And all so we can rearrange it for our own purposes."
"Let's not forget the vessel that must contain this Material and let it appear in this world."
"That's the biggest problem."
Kyousuke sighed.
As the train shook, the somewhat faded hanging banner for a regional bank swayed back and forth. It seemed to use a small child's drawing of a cat and rabbit as its mascots. It had a different sort of warmth than something from a highly-calculated product of a professional designer working for a global corporation like Toy Dream.
"Most everything related to the Summoning Ceremony can be set up by us summoners. Ultimately, we can even create artificial Materials: Deus ex Machina, Frankenstein's monster, Homunculus… But with vessels alone, it is highly reliant on innate talent. To be blunt, vessels require *a talent we lack*, so our Awards don't matter. Gathering some summoners and thinking long and hard on it isn't going to give us an answer."
"And that's why we took the Ultraloop and these slow trains all the way out here: To recruit someone the old-fashioned way."

“If a normal vessel won’t cut it, we just have to ask an abnormal vessel,” stated Kyousuke.
And who was the oddest vessel he knew of?
“The Meinokawa Series. They have the Joruri Method which led to the creation of mankind’s only fully-artificial vessels. To get their help, we first have to speak with the world’s oldest and first successful product: Meinokawa Aoi.”
To sum it all up, that Aoi was apparently worshiped as the Meinokawa Shrine’s secret object of worship.
She had the same warmth and suppleness as a human, but she could survive as long as an ancient text or a Buddha statue. She was a strange being of a different sort from the Materials.
“If only you had been able to contact those twins.”
“That’s kind of our fault for going too far in Toy Dream 35 and stealing their summoner job from them. Especially when Freedom provides no real support as an organization.”
It was pitch black outside the window. There was no bright nightscape like there was in the city. It was said true darkness inspired fear, but everything had its good and bad sides. From the train, that darkness felt almost soft.
“So this…Meinokawa Aoi? Is she the ultimate vessel?”
“Maybe so. Maybe not. She’s manmade either way, so as long as she can reveal the Joruri Method to us, maybe we can embed the traits we need inside her and maybe we can create an entirely new one from the ground up.”
He recalled those twin shrine maidens.
Their level of freedom had been pretty ridiculous. Creating an artificial vessel was a historic feat in and of itself, but the Meinokawa Shrine had tried to remove the unwanted vessel talent from human Higan while also preparing Renge as an *artificial summoner* in case Higan did not work out. The pair had ended up the opposite of the intended arrangement.
The Joruri Method could create a vessel or a summoner.
If it was that adjustable, then it might be possible to design a vessel which could contain a never-before-seen Unexplored-class like Kyousuke and Biondetta wanted.
Still sitting in the 4-person box seat, Biondetta looked up at the ceiling and Kyousuke sighed quietly once more.
“But in that case…”
“Yes. When things are going too smoothly, something always intervenes.”
The windows shattered on either side of the nearly-deserted last train. Even if it was a slow train, it was still moving quite rapidly, so how had someone managed to land on the side and jump in? The assailants who entered in unison were a never-before-seen form of Repliglass, which used silicon stem cells. And yes, *not even Kyousuke and Biondetta had seen this variety before.*

Their overall silhouettes resembled heavily-armored humans, but the five wings on their backs stood out prominently. Kyousuke narrowed his eyes when he saw that back equipment that rotated like a helicopter. Those bizarre wings did not exist in the natural world.
Also, their extremely enlarged arms came apart like unfurling ribbons to form seven tentacles each.
"…Released Creation, huh?"
Whether a robot, an android, or a replicant, the primary purpose of manmade machines was to reproduce the structure of other living things. The greatest examples were the robots with humanoid bodies or computers with human thought processes which were seen in SF.
But just as tanks and cranes did not resemble any living creature and just like the giant robots in fictional stories were not even remotely practical, people's imagination could sometimes surpass the limits of the natural world.
The same was true of Repliglass.
They had a variety of advantages, but the biggest was how difficult their movements were to predict. Using the traits of existing plants and animals gave you a treasure trove of data to work with, but it was also easy to imagine just how a mantis model, grasshopper model, or hornet model would move. A Released Creation did not have that. And in battle, calmly observing and putting together a new plan would require placing the chips of human lives on the table. When faced with bizarre, never-before-seen, and supersonic movements, waiting was the same as standing still while you were killed instantly.
Yes.
Unless your brain had greater calculation power than a supercomputer like Kyousuke's did.
"…I see."
Without any actual data to work with, he could only make general calculations, but with that much Repliglass muscle fiber bundled together into those tentacles, they could likely make jabs that surpassed Mach 2.5. He estimated them to be heavily-equipped models that weaponized their power and speed which could grab and crush their enemy with instantaneous speed rivalling a fighter jet's top speed and could knock down every last bullet when a Gatling gun was fired at them head-on.
Once they stood on the same stage as you, the Repliglass had essentially already won, whether they wanted to restrain you or simply behead you. The end effect would be little different from having them move freely while time was frozen for you.
(They're dangerous, but I guess they aren't going to give us a chance to stop the train.)
But Kyousuke responded with a disinterested sigh.
"Biondetta. Up above."
"Yes, sir."

Despite her miniskirt, the waitress spread her feet wider than her shoulders while pulling out her silver Blood-Sign (which was also a bolt-action sniper rifle) and aiming it toward the ceiling as instructed. She then fired a powerful shot. The recoil caused her long hair to flutter and her large breasts to jiggle while she pulled the cocking lever to load the next round and fired again. Her miniskirt fluttered. She repeated the action a third, fourth, and fifth time…
Something flowed by outside the speeding train's windows.
"Report."
"I didn't detect a hit. The sudden gunfire probably scared them, so they slipped off."
The plan had been the same as a cheap stage magician. The Repliglass had been sent in as an obvious threat while the actual summoner and vessel would make their attack from the roof. The Artificial Sacred Ground established by an Incense Grenade was initially a 20m cube. As long as it was close enough, it would capture the target even through walls. …That said, it could not be established when the user could not see the target with the naked eye, so the summoner had probably been lying down on the roof and dangling upside-down to peer in through the window.
"Didn't you say the boring slow train would be 'safe'?"
"My apologies, sir. I forgot to preface that with 'relatively'☆"
A tempo late, a wrinkled old voice cried out.
It came from the very compact old lady who had unfortunately been riding the same car.
"There's nothing to worry about, *young lady*."
Kyousuke said something to calm her down while he reached toward the back of his hoodie. He pulled out the Repliglass Blood-Sign named Phosphorus.
"You will forget all about this bad dream soon enough."
As soon as he finished speaking, everything set in motion.
But the Repliglass weapons should have noticed that control of this place had already secretly shifted to the Freedom 900 levels.
Modern warfare compressors sliced through the air from multiple directions with enough intensity to break the sound barrier, but the greatest weapons of those Alphas – as Kyousuke dubbed them – were the seven pairs of tentacles and those failed to reach the summoners' heads.
They had misread Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He took a step to the side so as not to get the old lady involved, but they should have noticed just how far he was planning ahead with that action.
A great crashing sound soon followed. The deadly stretching weapons grabbed at the heads and torsos of their supposed allies and the Repliglass weapons tore each other apart.
"You mechanically lock on using microwaves or infrared. At speeds surpassing Mach 2.5, the human pilots themselves can't hope to visually follow the action from beginning to end."

If a more cheerful color had seeped into Kyousuke’s soul, he might have hummed a tune.
As seen with a tightrope walker crossing between buildings, it was while relaxed that humans could draw out their greatest performance. You only hurt your chances if you let your muscles tense up from the nerves of brought on by great danger or a major challenge.
The summoner continued his one-way conversation while surrounded by a unique aura similar to “the zone” for a golf or shogi player and while constructing a world into which no one could enter.
“So I can intervene all I want during that ‘blank period’. I don’t have to face you head-on and stop you. If I give a slight push on your joints with the end of this stick to shift your movements just a little bit, those tentacles will end up going somewhere else entirely.”
However, this strategy should only work if he could accurately predict where those tentacles would go while moving with speed rivalling an afterburner and if he could reproduce precise movements akin to touching the side of a flying bullet with his finger.
Nothing could be more unreasonable than a subsonic object repeatedly controlling supersonic objects and guiding them to destroy each other.
But this was the proper form of a summoner.
A summoner was a puny human who controlled the higher Materials. You could not discuss their essence without mentioning the absurdity of a lower being exceeding a higher being.
The high-spec Alphas surrounded the slender and puny human and swung down their many tentacles and powerful arms in unison, but they suddenly found themselves turned to the side and destroying their fellow units.
The area sounded much like a scrap factory, the masses of special armor were tossed into the box seats and windows, and the entire car soon fell silent.
The only remaining noise came from the little old lady.
“Ah wah, ah wah wah, ah wah wah wah wah wah.”
“As I said before, you’ll forget about all of this.”
With that carefree comment, Kyousuke slammed the tip of his Blood-Sign into some reinforced glass embedded in the wall and pushed the large button there. It was labeled “Emergency Brake”, but no actual change occurred. Different trains had different systems, but this one likely sent an emergency signal to the driver’s compartment where the driver could manually activate the brake in stages. With so many hills and curves in the mountains, linking a publicly-accessible button with the actual emergency brakes would only increase the risk of derailing.
(But if there’s no response, then what’s happened up in the driver’s compartment?)
His smooth thoughts were cut off there.
The compact old lady’s words were not at all what he had expected.

“No, not that. I have no idea what is happening here, but my grandson went on up to the first car. He insisted on seeing the driver’s compartment!”
Kyousuke lightly snapped his fingers to call over his contracted demon.
“Biondetta, change of objective.”
“I don’t believe anyone said ‘help me’.”
“It’s only a matter of time.”
The cutting-edge weapons were lying on the ground as if sulking, so Kyousuke lightly pushed one over with his foot and quickly checked over it. Repliglass initially brought Government, the world police, to mind, but he could not find a serial number anywhere on these ones. Instead of being filed off, they simply had never been given one. Also, he had never heard of Government using the freakish designs of the Released Creations. So instead of used models sold on the black market, these were new models made in secret. Not many groups had access to the unique technology to create silicon stem cells. That would be impossible for the entirety of Illegal which was in conflict with Government 24/7. And Freedom took neither side and had no interest in developing technology outside of the Summoning Ceremony.
The list of suspects was narrowed down even further by limiting it to those who would actively interfere with Kyousuke and Biondetta’s attempt to create a concrete method of defeating the White Queen.
“Bridesmaid, hm? Does this mean their level of tech has improved a fair bit, or does it mean they’ve completely lost control without Azalea to guide their Repliglass development?”
“Either way, they’ll do anything for the Queen.”
“But there might be more internal conflict without someone so charismatic at the top.”
“Anyway, the emergency brake and the control center’s ATS haven’t activated. Are they performing a cyber-attack at the same time?”
“If this was that largescale an operation, they could just derail the train. To me, it seems more natural to assume the driver had been replaced with someone else before it arrived at our stop.”
That made it self-evident what they had to do.
“Let’s secure the driver’s compartment and stop this train. The speed seems to be steady, but there are a lot of slopes and curves on this route. Without speeding up and down appropriately, it could easily derail.”
“Yes, sir. I leave the route and method up to you.”
Biondetta smiled obediently as the white snake slithered out from her cleavage. That was the animal vessel she was contracted with. Kyousuke, on the other hand, had no vessel. That meant he could not wield his true power as a summoner.
But he made a suggestion regardless.
“Biondetta, you make a conspicuous diversion by heading straight down through the cars. And if there are any other passengers, make sure to rescue them.”

“Oh, dear. And here I thought Alice (with) Rabbit would want to do the saving himself.”
“I’m not so dumb I can’t analyze who has the battle power here. You can use the Summoning Ceremony and your sniper rifle, so you have more freedom. I’ll go the back way.”
“Yes.”
“And don’t forget our additional objective. Save that old lady’s grandson who went to the driver’s compartment and save all of the other passengers along the way.”
“Yes, sir.”
“Oh, and you can turn it into an emotional show if you want, but if you fail to save someone you could have saved, I will end our contract right then and there. The dramatic death of an innocent person isn’t going to make me swear vengeance anew against Bridesmaid or the White Queen.”
“Tch. How did you know?”
Biondetta stuck out her tongue a bit, rested her silver Blood-Sign – which was also a bolt-action sniper rifle – on her shoulder, and shook her decorative tail back and forth as she walked to the next car. Kyousuke watched the waitress leave and then returned his Blood-Sign to his back. He then leaned out a broken window and climbed up onto the speeding train’s roof with something like a pull-up or back hip circle.
Even with the one summoner eliminated by Biondetta’s gunfire, there were a few pairs still remaining on the roof. It was not easy fitting up there with the high-voltage line, pantograph, air conditioner motor, and other equipment in the way. If they could see him, then they could throw an Incense Grenade, but even without a vessel, Kyousuke had nothing to fear. He pulled the Blood-Sign from his back and whacked down the fist-sized objects thrown at him…sending them into the scenery rushing by.
A summoner and their vessel would be automatically carried to the point of their Incense Grenade’s detonation.
Kyousuke used that to take care of them.
“Ah, ahhhh,
ahhhh

the five-winged machines to lose their balance and crash into the conifer trees.
(Even if they'll forget all about it, Biondetta isn't trying to hide anything. She's got to be firing right in front of the passengers.)
Even that was not enough to shoot them all down, but…
"Whoops."
"!?"
They had five wings on their backs and seven pairs of tentacles, but they still stood on two legs. Just as an Alpha landed on the roof, Kyousuke stuck his Blood-Sign straight up to hold it against the stomach armor and delay its schedule by about 0.5 seconds.
It sounded like a temple bell ringing.
The train entered a dark tunnel and the edge of the semicircular tunnel entrance knocked the Repliglass weapon out of Kyousuke's sight. It was built to sturdy military standards, so the pilot would not die.
(Now, then.)
Kyousuke listened to the sounds of destruction caused by Biondetta's rampage inside the train while he dealt with the Repliglass weapons that had made it into the tunnel by knocking them into the high-voltage lines. Meanwhile, he continued along the speeding train's roof.
(Well, cutting the power line won't cause the train to stop right away. These days, they probably have an emergency control battery in case that happens. And having the power going out immediately activate the brakes would only increase the risk of derailing.)
Kyousuke and Biondetta did not stick to the same spot or route forward the entire time. Kyousuke would occasionally jump into the train through a window to kick a Repliglass weapon out the door on the opposite side and Biondetta would occasionally climb out a broken window, get down among the wheels below the floor, and fire her rifle at the summoners and vessels. It was like an acrobatic act at a circus.
And the machos who boasted they were undefeated when it came to street fights felt their knees go to jelly on this unstable level filled with trapezes and tightropes. Just a slight nudge on their back was enough to knock them down.
"I miss the Tanabata when these things actually felt like a threat."
"Humans know how to learn. We're used to this kind of scheme thanks to Azalea."
Inside and outside the train.
Kyousuke and Biondetta alternated between those two stages while casually exchanging words.
"By the way, there's someone at the connection to the first car. Age: about 10. Sex: male. He is showing hostile intent. He may be on his way back from an amusement park because he's holding a character wand in both hands and glaring at me. What should I do?"

“…Is he trying to protect the driver’s compartment from the suspicious group? As a sign of respect for the railroad boy’s courage, don’t harm him. Gently neutralize him.”
“Yes, sir.”
By the time the train left the tunnel, they had already arrived at the driver’s compartment in the very front of the first car.
Biondetta’s waitress-style miniskirt whirled around her as she kicked down the door and Kyousuke broke through the front windshield to get inside.
Because Kyousuke blocked his vision, Bridesmaid’s disguised driver reflexively tried to move back, so Biondetta swept his feet out from under him to knock him down despite her miniskirt.
“All done! With him out of the way, the train is clean, sir!!
“No, wait, Biondetta!!”
The demon of revenge looked puzzled, but the elderly man she had supposedly knocked down and caught in an arm lock was writhing unnaturally. And this movement showed no concern for the layout of his muscles or skeleton. It was almost like a pupa as the bug prepared to emerge.
They had concluded that Bridesmaid had sent in their own driver because he had acted to Bridesmaid’s benefit.
But what if that was wrong?
What if the driver was legitimate, but Bridesmaid had a way to make him act to their benefit?
The elderly man arched his back while lying face-down in the windswept driver’s compartment. It should not have been possible, but he looked Biondetta in the eye as she sat on top of him.
And something thick wriggled deep in his gaping mouth.
“Is that Repligla-…”
Just as Biondetta groaned that comment, something like a white spear shot out toward the depths of the vengeance demon’s beautiful throat. Even if she saw it coming, she could not defend against it with her arms and legs all being used to hold the elderly man’s joints in place.
So.
Her mouth only remained unmolested because Kyousuke had reached his hand in from the side and caught the flexible white object.
“Now this is a known Government product… A Hairworm built to intelligence standards. It’s a prototype model developed to force captured criminals to perform sting operations without a plea bargain. That way they can crush drug cartels.”
“Those justice-addicted freaks in full-body tights are using parasites now!?”
“Those things are famous for controlling snails to get birds to eat them, but did you know they had been redesigned for use on humans?”
However, this felt a lot like a trap set with knowledge of Alice (with) Rabbit’s refusal to take even his enemy’s life. Without Biondetta there, Kyousuke would have restrained the driver and fallen victim to the

Hairworm’s surprise attack. It was the same as placing an immobile injured soldier on top of a landmine to blow away the medic that came to rescue them.
Bridesmaid was a Queen-worshiping cult.
Just as Kyousuke and Biondetta had strayed from the proper path after contacting the White Queen, this group would not necessarily use normal tactics throughout the fight.
“Now, then.”
“Oh, sir? I didn’t realize you were enough of a train geek to know how to stop one.”
“Stopping them is easy,” Kyousuke casually replied. “But derailing them is even easier. There’s a chance that a crow placing a pebble on the rail could cause an accident and it would’ve been perfect if they could have piled up dirt in a dark tunnel to create a ramp on the track. Just use the train’s speed and weight to calculate out how far it’ll travel before it stops. By the time the headlights illuminate the obstacle, there’s no way the brakes will work in time.”
“…”
“That means killing us was not Bridesmaid’s objective.” Kyousuke breathed a weary sigh. “Would it sound nice if I called it reconnaissance? Anyway, they likely sent in disposable pawns to judge our strength.” And of course, a task was never complete at the reconnaissance and preliminary judgment stage.
If they were gathering data, they had to be planning a battle in which to use it.

Facts

- Kyousuke and Biondetta are visiting the rural Meinokawa Shrine to acquire the special vessel needed to contain the Unexplored-class theoretically capable of defeating the White Queen. If they can acquire the Joruri Method, it is possible they can create the type of vessel they want instead of recruiting one they happen across.
- Bridesmaid remains active after the defeat of Azalea and The Saint and they are still running a few Repliglass production plants. They have also somehow acquired information on Kyousuke and Biondetta’s actions and are attempting to prevent those two from contacting Meinokawa Aoi.

- If Bridesmaid truly intended to kill Kyousuke and Biondetta, they could have sabotaged the track, but there is no sign of that. Kyousuke theorized that they sent in enemies meant to be defeated in order to judge their strength.
- The information gathering is complete. The battle between summoners will finally begin.

Stage 01: Original Joruri Method Artificial Vessel, Meinokawa Aoi

“I may have asked for excitement, but I didn’t expect you to ask me to strip not five minutes after we met.”
“You misunderstand.”

(Stage 01 Open 07/19 06:30)
Original Joruri Method Artificial Vessel, Meinokawa Aoi

Part 1

It was July 19, Marine Day, at 6:30 AM.
The first day of summer break started in the worst possible way. With fireflies as the only light source and no artificial lights or convenience stores in evidence, searching for lodging at 1:30 in the morning had been a lost cause. And there had not been any blankets or other supplies for people stuck there overnight. The train’s windows had been broken and it had skipped several stations, but since summoners would be forgotten by normal people after leaving their field of vision, none of it would be considered a crime as long as they left after the battle. The people would fill in the missing memories for themselves and the train had continued on to get back to its proper schedule, so no one had remained here. The need to continue service even if this was the last train would have been felt more strongly than the presence of the summoners or Repliglass weapons.
As a result, Kyousuke had been forced to spend the night at the unmanned station which did not even have any benches. He had gotten down on the platform and used his knapsack as a pillow. However…
“Mgh.”
Something large and soft covered his face, obstructing his vision and breathing.
This station was not busy even during rush hour and he groped blindly to figure out what this was. And he soon found his answer. At some point, Biondetta had fallen asleep while holding his head in her arms. Her slender arms and giant breasts enveloped his head.
“Zzz.”
“Hey, Biondetta, breathing while asleep uses a different part of the nervous system, so you can’t fake it while conscious.”
“Tch. And I was hoping to laugh my ass off when you went for your defenseless big sister’s lips.”

The waitress demon finally released him from the soft headlock and smiled at him while still lying down.
“Good morning, sir. A proper breakfast will be difficult to prepare, but I can manage a continental.”
“…How?”
“Eh heh heh. Take a look at the seven tools of a contracted demon☆”
The waitress got up and pulled all sorts of kitchen tools from her travel bags. They seemed to be collapsible models meant for outdoor use, but a closer look showed none of them were commercial models. Steel panels and pipes had been cut up and arranged into a compact version of the precise tools of the trade she was used to handling.
But Kyousuke made a sleepy comment.
“This feels more like what a maid would do than a waitress…”
“Higiiii!? Y-you are a truly frightening client, pointing out exactly what I was worried you would notice!! Have some mercy!!”
Incidentally, a continental breakfast might sound like something impressive, but the term basically meant it had bread and milk. It might also come with a salad and scrambled eggs and the best you could hope for was some bacon or sausage. You could think of it as the breakfast served by a hotel’s room service or that some rich creep would enjoy along with an English newspaper.
In other words…
“I thought your bags seemed needlessly heavy, but do you have raw ingredients and a cooler in there?”
“Chemical cooling can preserve ice cream for three or four days without electricity. Use some military cushioning and…tah dah! These raw eggs are just fine.”
She proudly showed off a lot of camping equipment, but the fridge and raw ingredients had to be a lot heavier. She must have been picky about water because one of her bags had a water cooler bottle inside it. How many kilograms was that bottle alone?
“You really are needlessly picky… And you have all this but no cereal?”
“Are you planning to eat that every morning until the end of the world?”
Biondetta lined up the cooking equipment in front of her like a band’s drum set. While she got to work, Kyousuke pulled out his smartphone and began some light mental exercise. Just to be sure, he checked the TV tuner app and the online news sites, but there was no sign of an article about a train being attacked. Kyousuke and Biondetta could not always tell exactly how normal people filled in the gaps from their missing memories, but there did not seem to be anything to worry about this time.
“How many times did you wake up during the night?”
“Um, none that I remember.”
It sounded like a casual conversation held over the pleasant sound of eggs sizzling in the oiled frying pan, but these two were at Freedom’s 900 level. He looked up from the small screen as he continued.

“Then did Bridesmaid not attack again?”
“Since we didn’t sense any hostility, I can only assume so.”
Of course, he had previously been attacked in his sleep by Isabelle, the White Queen, and this demon just now, so that was no guarantee. If anything, Biondetta’s senses were sharper since she lived a life of conspiracies where so many people held a grudge against her.
“Okay, okay. All done.”
“Colorful as usual, I see.”
“The visual effect helps wake you up.”
The primary dish was two butter rolls. There was milk to drink and a plate held scrambled eggs with ketchup and two thick slices of bacon cooked until lightly scorched. For vegetables, they had corn and spinach cooked in butter. Bread, eggs, and vegetables. By deciding what to eat with the limited amount of bacon, the breakfast allowed for a fairly high level of customization.
“Red, yellow, and green… Oh? I happened to give it the colors of the Summoning Ceremony.”
“You didn’t do it on purpose? I assumed sneaking in some white with the milk was meant as a bit of harassment.”
“There aren’t many purely blue foods, so I had to use green instead. I don’t like forcing it by using artificial colors.”
“What about blueberries?”
“Ahh!? Right off the bat!?”
At any rate, they started eating.
If he let his guard down, Biondetta would have served him an ultra-high calorie breakfast along with a ridiculous drink that catered to her own extreme sweet tooth, but he seemed to have been lucky today. There was nothing surprising and it was honestly quite good.
“Now that we’ve eaten, what shall we do first?”
“Find a hotel.”
“Umm, the Meinokawa Shrine, the one and only key to defeating the White Queen, is right in front of us and things feel like they’re headed toward the climax thanks to the glimpses of the Bridesmaid soldiers that want to stop us…”
“And you want me to attempt the crucial negotiation with Meinokawa Aoi while carrying all this luggage and without changing into fresh clothes? I also want a shower. Since we can’t lay the groundwork in advance, 80% of the negotiation will come down to the first impression we leave. It doesn’t matter if the end of the world is only a day away; we need to be at least courteous enough to wash off all this sweat before visiting someone’s home, Biondetta.”

Part 2

“Sweep, sweep.”

Meinokawa Renge, a shrine maiden with long black hair, moved a bamboo broom in front of a vermilion torii. Houbi Village was #53 on the Top 100 Sights on the Archipelago – New Edition. It was also known for its water, both hot and cold. That might make it sound like a busy place, but it was actually a village in decline. It made a decent amount of money from the leisure-seeking tourists visiting the ocean during the summer and the mountains during the winter, but that did not actually increase the population. The village was not protected by the government like an Italian world heritage site, but they could not build a large shopping mall when they were required to maintain the beautiful scenery. That meant the only lifeline for shopping was to use the internet to order things from outside the village. This had actually freed the declining shopping district from having to provide the infrastructure for people’s daily lives, so the shop managers had gone with their own personal interests instead of worrying about profit, creating an odd bit of activity there.

Ever since it was announced the village would die in another three years, they had done their best to hang on and that had lasted for more than twenty years by this point. That was how Renge saw the village.

The Meinokawa Shrine was more on the mountain side than the ocean side. Simply put, it was at the base of the mountains that approached the village. The area was filled with straight cedar trees that had been brought in as some kind of fad long ago, so every spring it became a dangerous area that earned the ire of all the nearby residents caught in the fierce storm of pollen.

“Whoops.”

When she heard the distant melody of the radio exercise music, she could tell it really was summer break.

“The stamp. Don’t forget the stamp, miss.”

“After we eat breakfast, let’s all meet up at Yuuta’s house!!”

“How can you focus on having fun when you haven’t finished your homework yet?”

The Meinokawa Shrine where Renge lived was only a small shrine that had been completely forgotten by the region (even by the damned offering thieves). A much larger shrine located right on the road had grown much more popular, so the people of the village would probably think of that one first. That was the one they gave offerings to at New Year’s and it was where the small children gathered for the radio exercise.

Renge felt a little sad at being overshadowed by it, but it did not damage her pride.

(Well, it would be selfish to feel too sad when we *intentionally used it to hide our presence*.)

The concept of *goushi* existed in Shinto.

That referred to a shrine that constructed more than one building to enshrine multiple gods. This would sometimes happen when the enshrined gods were quite similar or another shrine had declined to the point that it had to join with a larger shrine in the area.
The Meinokawa Shrine was one of those.
In other words, it was all one large shrine. Theirs was the true shrine and the giant shrine placed conspicuously out front was no more than a decoy.
The Meinokawa Shrine, which followed the Summoning Ceremony and enshrined their *secret god*, called itself a shrine out of custom, but it was technically not a religious facility that enshrined any of this nation's myriad gods that were said to live in Takama-ga-Hara. They were registered as a religious organization, but the odds were high the normal people at the government office had completely forgotten about the registration document.
Even before the discovery of the Third Summoning Ceremony in 1999, this secret organization had used ancient traditions and folklore to predict the existence of beings beyond the gods and had trusted their instincts as they enshrined those beings despite there being no religious system or culture behind it.
Even when Shimabara was oppressed and the roadside Jizou were decapitated in the wave of anti-Buddhism, history was built up by those who maintained their purity in the face of that religious persecution on the surface. Since they had taken this form in the end, there was unlikely to be any greater form for them to take. Or so Meinokawa Renge believed.
(Not that I can celebrate the result when the secret god our ancestors worked so hard to protect *is that white thing*. Well, I'm not about to mock the belief in their hearts.)
No matter how it had begun, the Meinokawa Shrine remained to this day and Renge now held a bamboo broom there. That was a declining but solemn territory cut off from all worldly thoughts. It might look like a silly miniature garden from the outside, but Renge was thankful she could fill her lungs with that air. It was not simply passing all this down for generations that qualified as a miracle. The number of coincidences she had to thank *for her very unique birth into this world* was astronomical.
And as that black-haired shrine maiden enjoyed the refreshing morning, a sudden "change" appeared before her.
The scent of the exact same soap wafted from the flushed faces and wet hair of the extremely inappropriate and worldly pair of a pessimistic boy and a waitress demon.
It was Shiroyama Kyousuke and Biondetta.
They approached while looking like they had gotten into some kind of trouble while no one was looking…or rather, they were covered in the side effects of having shared a room and bathroom.

The sacred ground was destroyed!
“Finally, a familiar face. If Renge is here, this must be the Meinokawa Shrine.”
“Pant, pant. Sir, even if it’s early morning, it’s still midsummer. Heading out immediately after taking a hot shower was a mistake. The heat is trapped inside my clothes.”

Biondetta casually grabbed the chest of her waitress outfit and fanned herself with it.
Renge had not taken a bath, but her cheeks were the reddest ones there. Her eyes spun in their sockets.
“Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-what!!!???”
“?”
“Why!? This is a shrine! You’ll be cursed if you show up here after clearly taking a shower together and looking like you’ve cleared some major milestone!!!!!”
“Biondetta, what is she trying to say?”
“Pant, pant. I’m so overheated that my mind is refusing to work, so don’t expect much from me…”
When she saw Biondetta collapse down with her legs limply turned inwards (and while producing lots of heated breaths and sweet sweat), Renge’s confusion reached a critical point.
“Don’t think I can’t understand this! Girls can pick up on these subtle changes! My conclusion is the only way to explain why a young boy and girl smell like the same soap!! Awawawawawawah!!”
“Soap? Oh, the hotel’s.”
“Hotelllll!!!???”
The supplied soap and shampoo would be the same whether they rented a single double room or double single rooms, so Kyousuke simply tilted his head to ask, “What’s your point?”
Meanwhile, the pure black-haired shrine maiden could not stop her imagination from running wild with her completely mistaken conclusion, but she lacked the experience needed to imagine the crucial details.
“I-I can’t let Higan see this! I can’t let Higan see what has become of this defiled strongest idiot!!”
“Rengeeee, did you just call for me?”
“Higiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!! S-stay away, Higaaaaan!!!!!”

Part 3

There were many varieties of cicada, so the sounds of their cries changed depending on the time of day. They had not made much noise during the night and they seemed to make more of a *jiii jiii* than a *miiin miiin* during the morning.
There was no need to switch on the air conditioner. The wind blowing across the mossy garden and through the window screen was enough to stop their sweating. The refreshing Japanese building was protected by that water and air.
(Although the wood smells fairly new.)

Kyousuke and Biondetta sat on cushions in front of a tea table and glasses of barley tea were placed in front of them. Due to the ice in the tea, cold condensation covered the outside of the glasses.
“……
……”
“Now. Higan, do you know why Renge is collapsed on the tea table and refusing to move?”
“No. What *are* you doing, Renge?”
“Nothing,” was all she weakly said from the gap between her face and the table.
Meinokawa Higan was the shrine maiden said to be Renge’s twin sister. Their facial features were almost identical, but her long hair was blonde and her eyes were a transparent blue. And this was not due to dying her hair or wearing color contacts.
She was a Summoning Ceremony vessel.
As proof, she wore restraints that bound her own mind and prevented evil spirits from possessing her against her will. In her case, she wore a leather blindfold pushed up onto her forehead and a racehorse’s bit lowered around her neck.
“Well, as long as someone can get us in contact with her, it doesn’t really matter who.”
“Come to think of it, what brings you here, Shiroyama-san?”
“Are your parents here right now?”
“They left a note on the message board saying they were going to a neighborhood association meeting. Um, I think it’s a reminder that burglars will come to the village disguised as tourists.”
That was a very working class reason to miss someone, but then Biondetta narrowed her eyes.
“Huh? But we’re summoners and vessels, so if your entire family works on the front lines, wouldn’t they be completely forgotten by a gathering of normal people?”
Renge weakly waved a hand with her black hair spread out on the table like a dead jellyfish. She seemed to be saying to keep quiet about that *especially in front of Higan who remained ignorant of it all.*
…The greatest achievement of the Meinokawa Shrine was the construction of entirely artificial vessels using the Joruri Method and pairing them with the family’s skilled summoners for a stable supply of fighters.
It was a bit of a confusing concept, but if they specialized in “construction”, then it was possible some of them did not become summoners or vessels despite being so deeply involved with the Summoning Ceremony.
Although that meant the pairs like Renge and Higan would still be forgotten by normal people.
Renge finally raised her head.
“Well, pretty much everyone who lives around here is a Meinokawa. Even if the family name in front of the house changes, they’re still some kind of

relative, so plenty of people remember you even after you fall into the world of the Summoning Ceremony.”
“That would explain how lively the village seemed for its supposedly declining population. There must be a large gap between the population remembered by the official records and the population forgotten by them.”
The Meinokawa Shrine had once been taken by a Queen-worshiping group called Guard of Honor due to the debt racked up the gambling addiction of the twins’ parents. So even if they were surrounded by relatives, there must have still been a line drawn between them.
Kyousuke thought for a bit.
“There are some aspects of the Meinokawa Shrine’s system I don’t understand, so could you explain something for me?”
“Sure.”
“When trying to contact someone, would it be rude to go over your parents’ heads since they must be the current priests? Or can I get permission from shrine maidens like you? Is there a single, direct hotline, or are the lines drawn out in a network?”
“Who are you trying to contact?”
Kyousuke leaned in toward the black-haired summoner’s ear since she did not want Higan to know about the artificial beings. And he whispered to the girl who blushed at his unexpected approach.
(The very first Joruri Method. Meinokawa Aoi-san who is enshrined as your secret god.)”
And finally…
“This way.”
The twins parted ways and Meinokawa Renge alone guided Shiroyama Kyousuke and Biondetta. Blonde Higan puffed her cheeks out like rice cakes, but due to the great secret she carried, Renge could not let her sister know about the details of the Joruri Method. So Renge gave Higan a long series of chores to keep her busy in the kitchen: “Cook some somen, chop up the pickled vegetables in the underground ice room, thaw some corn, rub some soy sauce on it, cook it, and then cheer on the high school baseball team on TV.”
Meinokawa Aoi.
Since she was known as the shrine’s secret god, she would not be in an obvious location.
The black-haired shrine maiden guided them to the back of the normal shrine building. She touched the altar wall and the entire wall spun around like something from a ninja mansion.
As soon as she did, the already cool air grew downright icy.
“Is this…?”
“…a limestone cave?”
Kyousuke and Biondetta carefully observed the large space that opened up before them.

It was surrounded by walls of a whitish mineral. Thanks to the many smooth bumps on the walls and the drops of water dripping down them, it felt like walking into the stomach of a giant creature.
“The upkeep of this place is a real pain thanks to all the moisture. The hidden door is airtight, but mold sneaks in through the smallest gaps,” explained Renge as she grabbed some traditional sandals. “Take these shoes. It’s slippery, so it can be pretty dangerous.”
Since they could visually observe the cave, it obviously had a light source. Just like at a construction site, there was scaffolding of steel panels and metal pipes as well as angled ladders instead of stairs. Halogen lights were strung up by thick cables. The low, droning rumble heard in the distance may have been due to a tunnel ventilator.
“We entered through a fancy hidden door, but there are actually entrances to the cave all over.” Her answer was simple. “One route leads to our enshrined god, but there are plenty of other routes too.”
“I see. …Secrecy can be both good and bad, can’t it?”
“Tell me about it. Our ancestors apparently located the sacred ground here without giving it much thought, but they must not have understood the full scope of this vast network of caves. They only later realized how many other entrances there are. Now there are all sorts of sections built up in here: for sightseeing, for crystal mining, and for storing food, buried treasure, or other supplies. And all the ‘discoverers’ believed they had found a different cave.” Renge smiled bitterly. “We might want to forbid them from using the caves, but normal people won’t remember what summoners tell them, so there’s no way to stop them. We apparently filled in the holes in the past, but since they couldn’t remember any of it, they just kept digging back up the same spot. We’ve ended up deciding it’s for the best if the inside ends up a giant labyrinth. And meanwhile, we’re trying to divert the underwater rivers to divide up the caves using the powerful moisture and rapid currents. Although we can’t get too aggressive since the crystals mined here are used for our shrine’s protective charms.”
Her explanation continued as they walked across the metal bridges running across a giant underground lake. It was probably set up so choosing the safer route would take you away from the enshrined god.
The Meinokawa family may have brought in the materials for this as well. It seemed even religious occupations could be difficult.
“But with all this water in here, it’s kind of creepy to not see any bats, geckos, or other animals. I just hope that isn’t a sign of volcanic gases.”
“Oh, that’s one of the signs.”
“?”
“There are animals in the other tunnels. We haven’t put out anything to keep them away, but for some reason, none of them ever approach the route leading to our secret god. As if they’re showing respect for the sacred ground.”
They walked along the poor footing of the cave for about half an hour.

At the very back of a narrow tunnel, they found a thick steel door covered in gold leaf. The double door's gold was not a gaudy decoration; it was meant to prevent rusting within all the moisture. The lock actually looked more valuable. It was a giant, bag-sized padlock that had likely been in use for centuries. But that kind of lock did not look like it could be opened from the inside. Looking at it that way, the door almost felt like it led to a cell. Instead of preventing thieves from getting in, it seemed to prevent some great evil from escaping.
"Where's the key?"
"It was apparently lost a few generations back." After nonchalantly admitting that, Renge grabbed the antique padlock with both hands. "So you have to grab it like this, twist it this way, and push up on the latch inside. Diagonally…like this!"
With a heavy clunk, the lock really did open.
It looked a lot like an old lady hitting the corner of an old TV to get it working again. One had to question why they even bothered with the lock anymore, but the padlock was so rusted at this point that it seemed doubtful the key would have fit inside even if they did find it. In a way, they may have created a family security lock that was immune to analog picking and digital cyber attacks.
"Beyond this door lies Meinokawa Aoi…our shrine's god and, in a way, my ancestor," said Renge concerning the very first Joruri Method. "Are you ready? There is an even greater reason why we can't place her out front to gather visitors. She is a very…peculiar person, so prepare yourselves."
With that warning, she opened the thick and golden door.
And beyond those double doors, they found…

Part 4

It was either a stone temple designed to inspire awe or a stone crypt built to prevent its occupant from ever escaping. Either way, the space was shaped like a 20m die. And that geometry was instantly recognizable to any summoner or vessel.
(An Artificial Sacred Ground?)
Central American crystal skulls would apparently take centuries to complete if a spherical crystal were simply polished and worn down by human hands, but in that case, how much work had gone into creating this? The six faces had no seams and the surfaces were polished as smooth as human skin. It felt like a complex intertwining of the biological and the artificial, so it felt like being swallowed into the stomach of some giant creature.
Kyousuke had experienced something similar before.

(Sekurtiti's Egyptian-style temple combined a micro universe and a macro universe in the same room.)
Did that prove that the Meinokawa Shrine had used their experience and intuition to subconsciously distort the world before the Third Summoning Ceremony was discovered in 1999 and thus before the actual logic and system behind it all was completed?
The sacred ground that had appeared in Toy Dream 35 had ruled all space around the silver-haired and brown-skinned Tomb Priestess.
Then what was at the center here?
"…"
There was a stone torii.
There were three small steps.
At the very center was a miniature shrine about the size of two vending machines.
None of it used a single screw or nail. In fact, there were no seams to suggest stone had been piled up. It was all perfectly smooth as if the water dripping from the ceiling had carved away at the great stones micron by micron.
And in the slight depths of the opened miniature shrine, a thin and slender form sat calmly with eyes closed.
She resembled that greatest white evil in every possible way.
"……
……"
This was history's very first Joruri Project.
It was the Meinokawa Shrine's secret god, made to resemble the White Queen.
Her outlines were entirely motionless as if time had stopped. Her chest did not rise and fall with breath and there was no sign of the minute but uncontrollable movement of her muscles.
Was this what it meant to be artificial?
Kyousuke had known what to expect, but he still felt a strange sensation crawling up from the tips of his fingers. He was being sucked in. This was what happened when he knew the answer in advance, so if he had been caught off guard by it, he might have immediately run over to snap her neck.
From her hair to her clothing, she was a perfect reproduction.
He could see here why the Joruri Method was able to produce such skilled vessels. In the end, they too had *ended up* bowing before the white and creating a container into which they could invite that being.
And at the same time, he understood why Azalea Magentarain and Guard of Honor had been so fixated on the Joruri Method.
…The Meinokawa family could freely assemble entirely artificial summoners and vessels, but they had not had much of an effect on the world of the Summoning Ceremony. But what if that was not a tragic case of unrecognized genius? What if they had already burned out? What if they

had already completed their perfect masterpiece with *this*, their very first one? It was a lot like a mountain climber scaling Everest before any other mountain. That might make for an incredible record, but it would be a tragedy for the mountain climber themselves. They would be forced to wander forever in search of some new stimulation.
Silver twintails fell to waist level.
A wedding dress had been cut down to size and silver armor had been added here and there.
Her face and body allowed the cute and the seductive to coexist in a way impossible for humans.
Altogether, she was a sweet poison far too potent for humankind.
The only evidence that this was merely a lookalike was the thin layer of dust on her hair and eyelashes. Since the dust on the tip of her nose was not moving, she must have felt no need to breathe.
“Is this…?” Kyousuke gulped. “Is this Meinokawa Aoi…?”
As if to answer his question, something clearly filled the twintail girl seated in the miniature shrine. Rather than an external power, an internal power filled her and she began to move. Her eyelids were as dusty as an antique left forgotten in an old house, but now they trembled slightly as if she were stirring. Her eyes silently opened.
Those rosy lips had forgotten to breathe for so long, so what would they say first?
Everyone focused on that living legend as she finally moved.
With a heavy thud, her head, one arm, and one leg fell off.
“Wha-…!?”
Even Kyousuke widened his eyes at that, but there was no changing what had happened. After falling off on its own, the head bumped into the removed right forearm, but that was not enough to stop its momentum as it rolled down the short series of steps. It rolled right up to Kyousuke’s group and stopped with the face pointed straight up.
“Ho ho? You, the *kafay* worker. Those white and pink stripes do not seem to match the rest of your getup, so is there some deeper meaning there?”
“Oops.”
Biondetta looked fairly shocked as she held her miniskirt down with a hand.
“And you, my successor. Just because you are a shrine maiden is no reason to go around without wearing any of those newfangled Western *panteez*.”
“Ooooops!? You piece of crap!! You junk heap!!”
Renge blushed and used her sandal-wearing foot to kick the world’s oldest whatever-it-was like it was a soccer ball.
The living(?) severed head bounced off the walls several times, but it did not seem to affect her mood.
“Mwa ha ha ha ha ha!! If you don’t like it, then curse your own poor judgment for setting foot in my sacred ground when I have so much free time on my hands. I haven’t had visitors in forever, so I’m not about to let you go so easily. I hope you’re ready to have so much fun tonight that you’ll

feel the weariness down to the marrow of your bones. Not to mention that you've been getting lax about cleaning this place recently!!"
"W-we've had other issues to deal with!! Like our finances and our summoning jobs. And you're the one that drives your caretakers away by messing with anyone who bothers to come here!"
"Those worldly troubles only sound like bragging to someone kept in a bird cage to intentionally distance her from such things. Harumph."
"Anyway!!"
Renge roughly grabbed the severed head at her feet, stomped up to the miniature shrine, attached the arm and leg to the body, and then docked the head at the top.
"Your visitors seem to have something important to discuss with you, so switch over to serious mode!!"
"You have some guts talking down to your ancestor like that. If you want to challenge me, come back once your chest and sense of respect have grown some."
"…!?"
Before Kyousuke and Biondetta could sort through their thoughts, blushing Renge had ripped Aoi's head from her shoulders once more.
"And who the hell do you think designed me like this!?"
"Well, you were probably given a more modest chest to match Higan. Isn't that better than being built by someone with certain special proclivities, Renge?"
"Shut up! Don't you dare place Higan on the chopping block, too!"
"Poo hoo hoo. I believe we were talking about washboards, not chopping blocks."
"Sh-sh-sh-shut up! Bwah!!"
She rapidly inserted and pulled out the head over and over.
Kyousuke watched to see if treating the head more roughly than changing a lightbulb would have any effect, but that did not seem to be the case. The silver twintail beauty cracked her neck, stretched her arms upwards, and stretched her back like she had just gotten out of bed. Because she was modeled after the White Queen, this pushed forward her surprisingly large breasts.
"How can she move around just fine after that???"
"Back in the CRT TV era, there were apparently martial arts experts who could fix them with a karate chop, so maybe that's the perfect shock therapy for some centuries-old junk."
As Kyousuke and Biondetta whispered to each other, the black-haired shrine maiden shouted at the living legend while still blushing.
"C'mon, *granny*, those two seem to be caught in a whole lot of trouble, so listen to what they have to say! Isn't that what a shrine god is for? Letting people ask things of you while giving you offerings!?"
"You don't have to repeat yourself. I haven't forgotten. And I'm the secret god, so it's not like anyone shows up for New Year's. Ahhh, I want more to

do!! I get that the allure of the secret boss is lost if she doesn't stay hidden, but I'm just soooooo bored!!"
Meinokawa Aoi cutely puffed out her cheeks and then clapped her hands in front of her large chest with the smile of a mischievous child.
"But anyway, this 'trouble' you speak of has caught my interest. That sounds interesting indeed. I will hear you out to stave off boredom. If it is enough to provide a break in this tedium, I might just help you out."
The lookalike licked her lips as if she were viewing an extravagant feast.
In the end, this may have been what prayers really were.
The humans desperately made their way to the temple and begged the god to grant their wish, but the god was under no obligation to help them. In that case, the very first condition was to draw their interest. How justified or pitiable the human was may have only been one piece of the puzzle.
At the same time, Kyousuke felt like he had finally found a way to escape the confusion in his mind.
No matter how much she looked like her, the person in front of him here was not the White Queen.
The White Queen would never need to appraise the situation. As long as she could be with Shiroyama Kyousuke, she had found the greatest happiness and would ask for nothing else in the world.
The boy exhaled and faced the living legend once more.
"If you're looking for history's greatest way of killing some time, then you're in luck. You can rest easy knowing this isn't going to end up being disappointingly easy."
"What is it? Are you planning on proving *Fer-mah*'s Last Theorem?"
"Wipe that smug look off your face, old lady," said Biondetta. "Your information is a little out-of-date. Fermat's Last Theorem was resolved at the end of the last century."
"Eh? Seriously!? So how did it turn out!?"
"If you must know, you damn religious shut-in, $X^n + Y^n = Z^n$ has no positive integer solutions when n is a natural number greater than 2."
"I already knew the answer. The question was how to prove it…"
"Oh, that would be a pain to explain, so I'll pass."
"Yes, and that 'pain' is how *Fer-mah* caused the world so much trouble!"
No matter what anyone said, it certainly was a pain.
Aoi made her demand while placing her hands on the waitress girl's shoulders and moving in close enough that their noses nearly touched (although their large breasts were already squished up against each other), but Biondetta looked the other way and refused to listen.
And this was no time to be explaining a problem that had been solved before Nostradamus's prophesied end of the world.
"Hmm, so what is this problem that you claim is even more difficult than *Fer-mah*'s Last Theorem?"
Kyousuke's answer was brief.
"At the very least, this mystery is more exciting."

Part 5

“Now, as I explained when I paid up front, you clean up the scene, Lu-san. The collection of violence known as Illegal is better at that than the world police of Government, right?”

“…That rabbit makes it sound so simple.”
The black-haired beauty in a modified China dress put her hands on her curvy hips, viewed “the scene”, and began to seriously wish she had not taken this job. Paying her the full sum up front had been a way of preventing her from backing out. But since she had already received the full sum from Kyousuke, she had to do it.
(Maybe I should make Kyousuke-chan give me a full-body massage later…)
She was in a humongous container yard in the harbor block of Toy Dream 35, a giant amusement park city that already jutted out from the coast and into the ocean. Since a foreign company had taken a regional city and entirely remade it into a Toy Dream city, it was almost entirely void of agricultural and industrial facilities. The entire city was focused on the amusement park service industry, so in order to return some of the wealth to the region and thus reduce friction there, the production was handled entirely by the satellite cities. That meant it contained far more containers than average.
…And that also allowed one to inconspicuously sneak something suspicious in.
The sun was beating down on them during summer break, but no boys and girls in swimsuits were going to gather at the harbor block. And the brighter the sun, the deeper the shadows cast by the piles of containers.
“M-Manager…?”
A girl’s voice that was as sweet as candy reached Lu from behind.
The girl wore the kind of cleaning clothes a real maid would wear, which was not all that unusual for a Toy Dream city. Even with several bodyguards in black, if Lu Niang Lan the Perfect Dragon had her back turned to the girl, then she had to be an Illegal protégée.
“What is it, Framboise?”
They did not use their real names on the scene. That was an inviolable rule in their world.
So they were known as Manager and Framboise.
“Um…so what is this? I had heard it was a cleaning job, so I had assumed *it was a normal job of cleaning up blood stains and erasing bullet holes.*”
“Hmm…”
In addition to the short maid with a blonde bob cut, a few other girls in the same uniform peered fearfully inside the container, but the modified China dress beauty was unsure how to respond.

Harbor container labs tended to be used for synthetic drugs and that was not about to surprise Illegal at this point, but this seemed to be something more. Something like a translucent jelly was splattered thickly across the inside of the small metal room and it was slowly dripping down from the ceiling.
However, it did not seem like the container had been carrying something sticky.
It was more like…
(The container's surface itself grew corrupted…no, transformed? I can see the remnants of glass experiment equipment, but did they guide something by allowing it to consume them? Kind of like the sticks used for growing morning glory vines or the ablation that protects the shuttle from the atmosphere by allowing itself to melt away from the friction…)
"Well, if we trust the client, it's best not to read too much into this. We have a request, so we only need to fulfill it. This is a biologically based. Clean it at Level 3."
"Level 3? But that's enough to clean up a decomposing corpse that's been left alone for two weeks after death. Are rubber gloves really enough for this?"
"If this was truly dangerous, do you really think a VIP like me would have opened the container door without a gasmask or airtight suit?"
"If you say so," said Framboise with a pout of her lips. She then snapped her fingers. "Meringue, Chocolat, Marmelade. Once you complete the final check on the cleaning level, prepare for battle like always. Let us once more show our appreciation for the wonderful inventions of long boots, rubber gloves, and aprons."
"Sure thing."
"Forcing young girls to dress up as maids and handle filthy objects? What a sinful service."
"I'll pay you once you're finished. What do you want to eat?"
Once the gears got moving, it did not take long.
The true maid girls stepped into the container using their long boots and they began sprinkling a strange powder around, waiting for the mysterious jelly-like substance to cool and harden into something like wax, scraping it up with metal spatulas, and stuffing it in thick bags. Professional cleaning was about changing the way you thought. It looked like a magic trick to the modified China dress beauty. It reminded her of how she had blades hidden all across her body.
"But still…"
"Yes, what is it, Manager?"
"…I can't help but wonder what this is we've been asked to clean up."
"Ah ha ha. I know, right? I don't know what our shy client is so nervous about, but if it's a corpse, it would be a lot easier if they just said so."

Part 6

“There we go.”
Meinokawa Aoi’s voice echoed within the stone temple or stone crypt. The lovely bell-like tone of her voice sounded out of place with her archaic accent, but that aside…
A rustling of clothing followed.
The Queen’s lookalike had circled behind the mysteriously-constructed miniature shrine and then just her slender arm appeared from behind the structure and dropped the Queen’s clothing to the floor.
“I may have asked for excitement, but I didn’t expect you to ask me to strip not five minutes after we met.”
“You misunderstand.”
“Well, a god is meant to grant the meaningless wishes of you humans. Here, will this do?”
When Meinokawa Aoi appeared from behind the miniature shrine, she had removed the skimpy wedding dress with silver armor attached. Instead, she wore the bright white *kosode* and red *hakama* of a shrine maiden. She wore thick boots on her feet.
Kyousuke sighed and poked his index finger at the side of his head.

“You really are shockingly sensitive. I of course mean it in a negative way, but that Queen might have become a part of you at this point.”
Aoi followed his instructions and undid her silver twintails. Once her flowing long hair spread out behind her back, she really did seem to have more in common with black-haired Meinokawa Renge than with the pure white strongest of the strongest at the peak of the Unexplored-class. Renge and

Higan were seen as twin sisters, but when standing alongside the shrine maiden, Aoi also looked like Renge's sister.
Meinokawa Aoi seemed a little bothered with how the shrine maiden clothing fit because she bent her arms and pressed her elbows against her sides.
…Which of course squeezed her surprisingly large breasts from either side.
"Mhhh… Traditional clothing is such a poor match for large breasts. It seems to catch or grab at them and it's like something is missing. It doesn't quite fit right!"
"Oh, is that so?"
"Will this really survive a Summoning Ceremony battle? I'm afraid they'll pop right out if I move too much."
"For one thing, you're wearing it wrong," sighed black-haired Renge. "Why are your shoulders exposed? You aren't wearing the red undershirt like you're supposed to, are you?"
"Mh? Mhhh???"
"Don't strip right here! You're just making it worse!!"
"I always wear the same thing, so it's easy to forget how these things are supposed to work."
"But you shouldn't have anything popping out even without the undershirt. I've done a lot of traveling and I've never had an accident like that, so don't worry."
"You have nothing that jiggles around, so I'm not sure your assurance means much, Renge."
"I hope you're aware that mocking my body is the same as mocking Higan's, you scrap heap!!"
Kyousuke did not want to interrupt while she was blushing so brightly, but he had business to take care of.
"Um, can we get back on topic?'
"Of course!" announced Meinokawa Aoi while grabbing and lifting her two large masses with a somewhat dissatisfied look on her face. "I more or less understand. The *star-ter pak* already out there in the world is insufficient to defeat the White Queen, so you want to create a *boos-ter pak* that will provide the new rules you need."
"Has someone been tossing trading cards in the offering box at the shrine out front?"
"But the existing vessels are only made to handle the *star-ter* cards, so something might go wrong if you shove your own *boos-ter* card inside one. So you want me to create a vessel designed to handle that *boos-ter* card. Hm, it's a natural enough thought. …I suppose the most important part would be the heart…no, the blood."
"Hold on! Wait! Um, as my 'ancestor', should you really agree to this? I mean, this means making an enemy of *the* White Queen!!"
"Well, I am honestly jealous of the fear she inspires in everyone."

As Renge had pointed out, Meinokawa Aoi had no reason to directly fight the White Queen like Kyousuke and Biondetta did. Taking on an opponent so ridiculous that she could blow away the entire world with a single forehead flick provided an unbelievably high risk and nothing in return.
“I hate boredom.”
But the Joruri Method vessel who had given up on being a lookalike only grinned.
She also continued the *jiggling* to test the durability of her shrine maiden outfit.
“And the primary reason for my boredom is the fact that I was created as her lookalike. As long as she is the strongest, people will appreciate me as a mere decoration. But what if the White Queen were to die? Who would need a lookalike anymore? Wouldn’t I be able to walk the world as a true individual, bound by no one?”
She may have been similar to the Yellow Gills, one of the Unexplored-class Three, who utterly loathed the White Queen for restricting her freedom. But unlike the Yellow Gills, Meinokawa Aoi did not greedily seek victory. It was her desire to escape boredom with a life-risking thrill that made opposing the White Queen look so appealing.
(Her foundation is a lot like the Yellow Gills and her self-destructive desire is a lot like Biondetta… She tries to act like a funny eccentric, but it’s already obvious that this hedonist has a screw loose.)
“Are you thinking something rude by any chance, sir?”
“It’s getting harder and harder to know what *you* would find a compliment.”
Kyousuke sounded exasperated, but Biondetta narrowed her eyes a little.
He frowned.
“What?”
“Oh, nothing. I was just thinking that you’ve changed, Kyousuke-chan.”
“That’s too abstract.”
“It used to be that you would never just come out and say there was something you didn’t know. Is this the result of transforming your weakness into strength? How cute.”
“…”
“I don’t think it’s a bad thing. It’s a lot like a Roman encountering the concept of zero after always counting from one on his fingers. Or maybe even coming across variables like X or Y. You’re willing to keep going when you come across something you don’t understand because you know it will help you solve even more complex calculations, right? I’ve always thought it was your tendency to solve all the equations placed before you that makes it so easy for that cruel white to predict exactly what you’ll do. It’s like you open every single email in your inbox from top to bottom, whether they have a virus in them or not.”
“That’s being rather harsh.”
“My apologies, sir. I will restrain myself in the future. As long as I am feeling nice, anyway.”

As the Freedom 900 levels held their conversation, so did the two shrine maidens.
Meinokawa Aoi spoke in a tone that suggested she had an overabundance of heat inside her artificial body.
“Yes, if you would break the chains of this stagnant peace, I would be willing to offer you my assistance, human. So in exchange, you *help me*. Free me from this restrictive position where everyone sees me as that Queen.”
Kyousuke sighed.
He had been planning to help her in the first place. He had also been planning to finish off the White Queen. So he had no reason to refuse. In addition to her knowledge, he could use a vessel in order to fight since they had already seen signs of Bridesmaid.
But something still bothered him.
For the time being, he stamped an X on that odd feeling inside him and he gave his answer.
“As you wish.”

Part 7

It could be a small blade, a pin, or their own canine tooth.
A summoner always had a certain “protective charm” on hand just in case. All it had to do was thinly slice the skin of their fingertip so a red drop of blood would well up.
Needless to say, this was a necessary process for binding a contract with a vessel.
“I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering ‘Yellow’ Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – v o z – t i x – e i – y w – z a), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things.”
Kyousuke used a thin razor blade.
The red drop on his index finger glittered like a jewel as he held it out toward Meinokawa Aoi.
“You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world.”
He touched her lips more than her tongue.
The red drop burst, soaked in, and spread through the girl’s mouth. As the rusty flavor permeated her tongue, more and more spiritual contact points opened within her body and created a powerful link between their souls.
The pure shrine god arched her back.

Her exposed skin grew flushed, beads of sweat poured from her artificial skin, and an unmistakably feminine scent filled the air.
“So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!”
It was all completed without delay.
But at the last moment, Kyousuke felt an indescribable sensation race along his spine.
(?)
“…Is something…pant…the matter…? Phew…”
“No.”
He had just bound a contract with an entirely artificial vessel. That may have made it feel different from normal.
“Welcome, Meinokawa Aoi. You are now my vessel.”
“Of course. Hee hee hee. It’s been so long since I’ve actually fought. I’m itching to get started!”

Part 8

By binding a contract in the name of the Yellow Gills, the member of the Three that symbolized Freedom, Kyousuke had acquired Meinokawa Aoi as a vessel.
On the guidance of the black-haired shrine maiden, they left the long cave and returned to the shrine building. The sky had already grown orange as evening fell. They had not meant to stand around talking for so long, but that solemn sacred ground must have messed with their sense of time.
“Nnnn. Experiencing things in real time feels so nice after so long.”
Meinokawa Aoi’s joints must still have felt off because she stretched her arms and her back, causing her long silver hair to flutter behind her. And that pushed out her surprisingly large breasts. She must have felt more distance between her body and mind because she was defenseless in a variety of ways.
Kyousuke sighed.
“I would like to know everything I can about the Joruri Method. How far can I go with the official texts, and which barriers can I tear down with your advice on top of that? That will change the number and type of barriers standing between us and the vessel we need.”
“Wait. There is no need to hurry.”
Aoi waved a hand dismissively.
She may have also been bothered with the straight hair made by undoing her twintails because she swept it back off of her shoulder and placed her index finger on her temple.

“I swear on my name that I will provide the artificial vessel you desire. So allow me to enjoy the fresh air some more.”
“…”
“You seem to think I am wasting time. Well, you are exactly right!! I don’t care about humanity’s future or the fate of the world. Have you forgotten that I am only helping you in order to distract me from my boredom?”
Many temples and shrines were placed atop high mountains so they could look down upon the world below them, but some theorized that it was also a way of providing a sense of accomplishment for the visitors who made the difficult ascent to reach them. Basically, the high of mountain climbing or of a marathon was used to make the torii and Buddha statues look more divine. In the same way, Meinokawa Aoi may have been giving them a long lead up to the big boss to increase the ultimate sense of accomplishment.
“I don’t have time for this.”
“Say what you wish, but threatening me won’t accomplish anything. Don’t forget that you cannot twist my head like a faucet to produce knowledge on demand. But you can leave the fine-tuning of the blood to me. Hm, hm, hmm☆”
Kyousuke gave her a bitter look.
Biondetta leaned her alluring body up against him and gave him a secret smile.
“As we thought, this isn’t going to be easy, sir.”
“And why do *you* look so pleased about this? You know we’re in the same boat here, right?”
Regardless, Meinokawa Aoi held the key to it all, but she childishly said she was off to the candy shop and started to run outside, so they had to run after her. That said, losing her head was not a real problem for her, so she would at least be easier to protect than a normal person.
Incidentally, Blonde Higan was napping with her upper body collapsed on the tea table in front of the fan. Her shoulders were steadily and defenselessly rising and falling. Her sister had ordered a lot of somen and cooked sorghum, but it had been too much to eat alone, so she had likely eaten it with her parents. That allowed Renge to shout at the first Joruri Method who had left out the front door.
“Watch out for cars, don’t follow any strangers, and be very careful if you see any non-Meinokawa summoners and vessels!”
“What do you take me for!?”
“I’m either treating you as a child running an errand on her own or as a senile old woman wandering away from home, so which is it going to be?”
Hearing the girl’s harsh voice, the silver-haired shrine maiden trembled and hid behind Kyousuke’s back. Aoi saw no prestige in being “the original” of anything, so she could not stand being seen as an old lady.
She must have really been afraid because she did not seem to notice how much she was pressing two warm objects against the boy’s back.

“O-ohhh… Since you do not seem to have inherited my knowledge of how to treat a lady, I am somewhat worried about the evolutionary pattern of my successors.”
“Really? They transformed this utter failure into someone with a proper head on her shoulders, so I’d call that a succe-…”
“Do you want to see a grown woman cry, you brat!?”
That carried an implied threat, so Kyousuke fell silent.
She looked just like the White Queen, but he was unsure how to behave around her.
Kyousuke and Biondetta had followed her out here simply because they were worried about the passage of time while in that closed crypt. Just as Aoi had not been up-to-date on Fermat’s Last Theorem, it was possible they had failed to grasp the changing situation outside. Acquiring an artificial vessel using the Joruri Method was a major accomplishment. They could not have the White Queen or Bridesmaid interfering, so they had to confirm their safety before getting to work.
“Huh? I don’t remember that shrine maiden at the shrine.”
“Mwa ha ha! I am what they call *sooper rayr*, so you won’t see me all the time. You should count yourself lucky for running into me like this. By the way, what is all this racket about? Are you preparing for a festival?”
“Why doesn’t a shrine maiden know about the shrine’s festival? There’s something fishy about her!”
“Mwa ha ha ha ha ha!!”
The neighborhood kids did not hesitate to speak to her and the old people looked up in shock, stopped working, and quietly prayed to the silver-haired shrine maiden. They must have known about the Meinokawa Shrine enough to recognize Aoi.
Kyousuke watched Meinokawa Aoi’s back as she walked on ahead.
“…Something bothers me about this.”
“What is it, sir?”
They were traveling along the road from the Meinokawa Shrine to the idiosyncratic shopping district. The narrow farm road cut between the paddies that shined orange in the setting sun and Kyousuke viewed Aoi who remained a step ahead like a child.
Before long, they arrived at a small bridge crossing a clear stream that glittered in the orange light.
“Orahhh!! I was just thinking it was too damn hot, so what is this they’re doing? If you’re playing the water, how about I join you? I’ll jump right in!!”
“Wah! You can’t! It’s too shallow!!”
“Agah!?”
“What did I tell you!?”
It should have been obvious when the water was only at knee level on the small children, but Meinokawa Aoi jumped off the bridge while still wearing her shrine maiden outfit. After the painful-looking impact, she floated up to the of the water’s surface. Since she started laughing uproariously as soon

as her face surfaced, they could only conclude that the Joruri Method was quite sturdy.
“Oh, that is quite the impressive water gun you have there.”
“It uses static electricity to bend the water, so it can hit you no matter where you run!”
“I-is that what they call *hoh-ming*!? That water gun has some nerve!”
“My smartphone lens uses facial recognition to pursue the target!!”
“*Smart-fohn*? Technology advances so quickly.”
That mass of mysticism sat on the river bottom with her clothing soaking wet and see-through. When she noticed the blasts of clear water gathering toward her inner thighs, not even Aoi could ignore it.
“That’s it, you impudent brats… A true warrior needs no tools. I can form a water gun by holding my hands together like this!”
“Wha-!? A long-forgotten firing method!? Bwah!”
“Mwa ha ha ha ha ha!!”
As Kyousuke peered down from the bridge railing, he noted that one’s method for a hand water gun could reveal *where* the user had learned it, just like with the subtle variations in rock-paper-scissors or tag. For Kyousuke, playing in the water reminded him of the indoor Pool of Tears that he, Biondetta, Shiroyama Kyoumi, and the others had used. At the children’s insistence, Aoi gave them a quick lecture and they divided into two teams. Whether she was satisfied after playing so much or she was searching for a more worthwhile rival, Meinokawa Aoi waved both hands up at the bridge, smiled, and shouted up at them.
“You come down here too! Hyah, river water is just so different!!”
He waved back to decline the offer. Their skulls were not solid enough to survive a collision with the rocks from this height.
“This just doesn’t seem right,” he said while looking down at her with a smile of peace itself. “No, it’s all progressing smoothly. So what is this? It’s like something is missing or like I can’t find the hurdle that should be there.”

“Aren’t you overthinking this?” asked Biondetta. “Besides, you certainly did your fair share of complaining when we were riding the trains to reach here.”
“Oh, right.”
Kyousuke gestured down from the bridge, so Aoi reluctantly left the river with her bright skin color showing through her clothing.
“Miss, will you be going to the festival?”

“Of course. I always feel the need to get involved in anything that sounds like fun!”
They had of course not considered bringing a change of clothes for her.
After leaving the kids playing in the river, Aoi seemed perfectly carefree while walking down the farm road. She grabbed the skirt-like bottom of her red *hakama* and wrung it out like a rag to squeeze the clear water onto the road. Once done with that, she grabbed the entire *hakama* with both hands and flapped it in the air. She did not seem to mind the bright skin showing through the white *kosode* or the soft thighs boldly bared below the raised *hakama*. Her leather boots sounded like rubber rain boots as she walked.
“I’m absolutely soaked. Well, it’s still quite hot even if it’s evening, so I should be dry by the time we reach the shopping district.”
“…I just hope you aren’t underestimating the drying time.”
“More importantly, is your wallet all right after jumping into the water like that?” inquired Biondetta.
“Mwa ha ha. Not to worry. My coin purse only has change inside! I’ve never had much use for paper bills!!”
“That’s not really something to brag about.”
“Wahp.”
As the silver-haired girl’s bright skin showed through the fabric of her shrine maiden outfit, Kyousuke bluntly tossed a large towel at her face.
“Direct your thanks to an old man who passed by. Although he might’ve forgotten all about it as soon as he looked the other way.”
“…What are you so worried about? My body is fake.”
“I’m worried regardless.”
When he said that, Aoi matched her pace to his and laughed a little.
“Hee hee.”
“?”
“Oh, it’s nothing. Hee hee hee.”
Meinokawa Aoi moved right up next to him, so the waitress demon lightly cleared her throat.
“Ahem. Now, sir, as we were discussing…”
“Right.”
The farm road arrived alongside the beach, so they detected a powerful salty smell. The sea breeze blowing in from the distant ocean horizon did not seem good for growing rice, but the locals might have thought that applying some stress to the crops caused them to grow more strongly.
“Everything up to arriving in Houbi Village was correct. No matter how carefully we plan, there will always be an accident or two standing in our way. That’s why everything since that has been so strange. …What caused the change? Needless to say Bridesmaid did send in their summoners and Repliglass soldiers, but it’s all gone shockingly smoothly since then. But that smoothness doesn’t sit right with me. The only real hurdle is that Meinokawa Aoi wants to be satisfied before getting on with the plan. It may not look like it, but we’re trying to acquire a trump card for killing the

White Queen. The entire religious world should be fighting back against us.”
“Hmm. Has the White Queen trampled on you so much that you get uneasy when things go too well? Or should I say she’s trained you so well that you’re about ready for her to give you your reward???”
Biondetta’s pointed tail decoration swished back and forth as she made a cruel joke to dig at his trauma, but Kyousuke ignored her. He directed his thoughts even further inward.
And he continued watching Aoi’s back as she walked a few steps ahead of him.
(Was I placed on some kind of rails at that point?)
He tried to drag something concrete out of the sludge deep in his mind that hid countless possibilities, much like the primordial soup. But it was not enough. He had too little information to determine the answer.
(But what is this about? What does Bridesmaid gain by calling us to this village?)
At that moment, he just about ran into Meinokawa Aoi’s back.
She had seen something and stopped.
All sound receded.
The cheerful voices vanished and silence fell over the area as if it had been cut off from the rest of the world.
“…?”
Kyousuke placed his hands on Aoi’s slender shoulders to stop himself from bumping into her and then he looked to the cause of this.
It was a perfectly normal intersection between narrow coastal farm roads.
It was twilight and a crossroads.
Both the time and the place were said to invite oddities and someone stood there as if part of a ritual.
“What…?”
It was a girl holding the brim of her straw hat with both hands.
She wore a light pink rose decoration on her chest.
She was maybe 135cm tall.
The short girl’s long blonde hair was worn in two braids down her back and she wore a deep blue school swimsuit, a decorative collar that only covered her neck and shoulders, a ridiculously short pleated skirt, and a white floral print pareo. The brim of the large straw hat covered her eyes, but a strange prickling pain spread from Kyousuke’s forehead to the rest of his skin.
She wore a thick chain over one shoulder and diagonally down her torso.
What she wore at her side like a brand-name bag was actually a giant lock.
Needless to say, that was a symbol of restraint and bondage.
It was the defense mechanism used by vessels to bind their mind and protect themselves from evil and vengeful spirits.
“Counting just the paved ones, there are currently 7,010,891,750 roads on this planet. There are 120,970,672,894 crossroads between them. Now,

what are the odds of two people walking down the road to happen across each other by chance?”
This was not good.
He could not afford to see this.
“But the two of us were still reunited, Onii-chan. Were you simply too naïve as you made your choices like a form of book fortunetelling? If your willpower had been just a little stronger, this might have been avoided.”
His instincts whispered those warnings. His experience raised the alarm.
The problem was the location. If he had been anywhere in the wide world other than Houbi Village, he might have celebrated this reunion.
Yes, hadn’t Meinokawa Renge said any non-Meinokawa summoners and vessels would be highly suspicious? Given what Kyousuke’s group was attempting, the odds were quite good that they would be a member of the Queen-worshiping cult known as Bridesmaid.
So if he could think of no reason why he would see someone here, it did not matter who they were.
“Ha ha☆ Aren’t you glad I prayed to the White Queen, the strongest of the strongest, every single day, Onii-chan!?”
The girl lifted the brim of her straw hat to reveal the face below.
All the hair on Shiroyama Kyousuke’s body bristled.
He knew her.
She was one of the Alices he had once saved. And she was someone he had supposedly cut all ties with.
And even among those Alices, this one in particular reminded him of a small baby bird.
Her snowy white skin reminded him of a fairy.
Disbelief filled Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes as his trembling throat forced out her name.
“…Olivia…Highland…???”

Secret Document Concerning Kingdom F 01

Olivia Highland
That was the vessel girl who had been contracted with Shiroyama Kyousuke before he announced his retirement.
She was the first in line to the throne in an Eastern European kingdom generally known simply as F, but the kingdom itself had been overthrown, the monarchy had collapsed, and her life had been targeted. She had bound a contract with Shiroyama Kyousuke to confirm the disappearance of her mother, the kingdom’s final monarch.
She had behaved like a wounded beast at first, but through contact with Kyousuke, she had gradually regained her original innocent disposition. She

had also had utter faith in the Unexplored-class, especially the White Queen and the Three, so even as she braved the battles of her collapsing kingdom alongside Kyousuke, she had frequently prayed to the White Queen.
On the outside, it had looked like inviting in too many foreign corporations had created an influx of foreign values which triggered a great backlash against the insular monarchy…or so the reports had said, but behind the scenes, the rebels had been plotting a secret scheme concerning the Summoning Ceremony. It was assumed they were plotting to steal the White Light Circle which was viewed as a royal treasure.
The details were unclear, but legend claimed that treasure could immediately summon the White Queen, so Kyousuke, Olivia, and several other summoners and vessels had fought an unseen war over it.
Later, it had been revealed that the royal treasure had actually referred to the people of Kingdom F.
It was said the White Queen would swing down the hammer of punishment when rebels appeared to tear apart that beautiful land of ice and snow.
The records of that battle's result were lost and it is difficult to accurately follow what happened, but Kingdom F has regained its monarchy and there are unconfirmed reports of a mother and child seen embracing and weeping among the war-torn ruins.
There is one voice recording of the mercenary summoner who helped Olivia Highland reclaim the monarchy, so I will attach that to the end:
"…Do you really think you can pass that off as justice, Queen?"

Facts

- Good or evil, right or wrong, Meinokawa Aoi will listen to anyone's request as long as it will stave off her boredom. She bound a contract as Kyousuke's vessel because she thinks she will be freed from her position as a lookalike if the White Queen is destroyed.
- Meinokawa Aoi seems to have an idea how to acquire the artificial vessel needed to contain Kyousuke's proposed Unexplored-class which can kill the Queen. But he must curry her favor to get any further.
- Kyousuke believes someone is intentionally allowing things to progress so smoothly.
- The Bridesmaid assassin who appeared before Kyousuke was Oliva Highland, one of the girls he once saved.

Stage 02: An Enemy Named Olivia Highland

“Onii-chan, what you’re saying makes no sense…”
“Probably not. But it’s the truth.”

(Stage 02 Open 07/19 18:30)
An Enemy Named Olivia Highland

Part 1

“Why…?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke already knew the answer to his question.
But he could not stop the meaningless words.
“Why are you here? How were you able to come here!?”
“Ha ha. What, you aren’t going to call me Via like you used to?”
It was a truly innocent smile.
Just like back then, it was as bright as the sun and contained no hint of wickedness.
Olivia did not hesitate to answer while showing off her skin with her risqué swimsuit.
“Obviously, I’m here because I regained my memories of you by binding a contract with a new summoner.”
“…!!!???”
Who?
That was all the information Kyousuke needed to know that she had strayed dangerously far.
Her mother, the other monarch of Kingdom F, had been a veteran vessel. So even after her contract with Kyousuke ended, she would remember this world every time she saw her mother’s face. To prevent that, that monarch had left her daughter with her wet nurse until she had grown enough to accept the truth of the world.
But it had all been for naught.
The world’s malice had easily destroyed everything they had built up.
“You really are cruel, Onii-chan. We spent so much time supporting each other, but as soon as my problem is resolved, you erase my memories and just throw me out like yesterday’s trash? My life didn’t just end there, you know? What if a bad guy got to me while you weren’t looking???”
She was completely oblivious to the fact that precisely that had happened to her.

“But the strongest of the strongest at the peak of the Unexplored-class is different! She called me to her as her servant, brought back my memories, and gave me this opportunity to meet you again!! The White Queen is incredible!! She’s so cool!!”
And it was all the same as back then.
She left her body and mind defenseless by not doubting the White Queen in the slightest. She truly believed the legends that the White Queen was an incarnation of radiance, justice, and benevolence.
She was different from Azalea Magentarain and the others who saw how twisted the Queen was but followed her anyway. She was a Queen worshiper, but there was no sign of the usual stickiness in her.
“I’m having trouble following this…”
“Indeed.”
Biondetta and Meinokawa Aoi recovered before Kyousuke himself.
And because they did not know the background here…
“This is getting tedious. Shouldn’t we hurry up and get rid of her?”
“Wait, Biond-…”
“Ha ha. Do you really think I’ll let you???”
Her voice was sickeningly sweet.
With an innocent smile on her lips, a straw hat on her head, and a rose decoration on her flat chest, Olivia’s announcement indicated that the end had already begun.
At first, it looked like a meteor shower had colored the twilight sky.
But by the time he realized it was a series of regulated lines travelling from the ocean horizon, over the farm road, and toward the mountain side of the village, Kyousuke felt a definite pain in his heart. He had identified those countless lights filling the celestial canopy.
“It’s a cheap multiple launch rocket system. They say it’ll level everything from the ocean.”
Olivia smiled.
She smiled and smiled and smiled while providing that nightmarish answer in her school swimsuit, decorative collar, ridiculously short miniskirt, and floral print pareo.
Her expression looked right at home in the midsummer.
“Counting the parent bombs, child bombs, and grandchild bombs, a set of 20 will ultimately split into 18,000. They’re designed for a 30km space, so with two sets, you can destroy two or three tank companies, but you need to be careful because a lot of them end up not going off. Got that, O – ni – i – chan☆”
How many people were there in the village?
There had been a lot of children playing in the river not far from here. The old people preparing for the festival had stopped working and silently prayed when Aoi had walked by. Plus, that festival would be held at the shrine before long, so everyone would be excitedly looking forward to the event.

“Olivia…!!”
But he did not have time to protest.
The deadly canopy dropped down like a spiked trap.

Part 2

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!!!!!!

Part 3

Instead of dropping explosives on top of a designated target, the destruction dug up the land across a set range.
“!!”
When the bombardment struck, Kyousuke and Biondetta had tackled the silver-haired shrine maiden into a waterless paddy.
But Aoi chose to continue rolling until she was on top of them. Despite being entirely artificial, she had the warmth and softness of a living being. If the explosive blast hit her, she would be as easily torn apart and blown away as any of them. And yet she did not hesitate to make her choice.
Perhaps that was her nature as a shrine god created to protect.
“Well, now. I never thought the day would come that a lady would need to be so tough!!”
If they lost Meinokawa Aoi here, they would lose their path to defeating the White Queen. But Aoi seemed entirely focused on saving the lives in front of her.
Meanwhile…
The destructive storm swept across the land like a tractor’s rotating blades slicing up the worms in the dirt, but Olivia did not even get down on the ground while wearing her school swimsuit, decorative collar, pareo, miniskirt, and straw hat.
The most she did was grab the brim of the hat with both hands.
A gust of wind too weak to call a gale blew her pareo and miniskirt up, exposing her bright thighs and the armpits inside her short sleeves.
That bright coloration was like a sacred ground.
It did not allow even a single red scratch.
“Good, good, good. Once everything’s been leveled, the landing unit can come in. It’s time for the Hover Edges to do their job. Nya ha ha.”
She spoke calmly while still standing in the center of the crossroads.

Yet when exposed to an explosive blast, standing rather than getting down increased the odds of death by more than 50%.
A great quantity of explosives continued to rain down from above and something approached from the distant ocean horizon. Whatever-they-were raced toward the coast while spread out at even intervals, so they were probably giant Repliglass craft loaded with summoners and vessels.
Released Creations ignored the structures of existing plants and animals, so there was nothing in particular to reference, but in Kyousuke's view, they looked like sports kite monsters skimming just off the surface. Assuming of course, that kites had creepy compound eyes that accurately scanned the terrain and large propellers to provide thrust. Describing such a device was simple, but creating one would be difficult. Aircushions were viewed as convenient amphibious vehicles, but when piloting one through rubble, there was always a risk of the inflated float being damaged. These probably combined the best features of an aircushion and a glider, allowing them to move smoothly and rapidly while occasionally adjusting their altitude.
"Don't worry. I doubt any of them will hit you, Onii-chan."
As 18,000 explosives rained down, the words of a 10-year-old girl were what caused the waitress demon's face to tense up.
"You're kidding…right? Those are non-guided, area-suppression rockets! They won't avoid you if you're clutching a cheap GPS in your hands and they're supposed to evenly blow up everything within range!!"
"This is the world we live in. Onii-chan, you've caught on by now, haven't you?"
Kyousuke clenched his teeth in the waterless paddy as her heated and hopeful gaze fell on him.
He spoke the idea that welled up in his chest.
"…So that's what's going on."
"This is the world you wanted, isn't it?"
Who had given him this present?
The worshipers in Bridesmaid, or the White Queen herself who stood above them?
"But why did you bring the villagers into this summoner battle? If you knew this attack couldn't kill us, there was no point in making it!!"
"Ehh? But this is something you taught me, Onii-chan."
She sounded somewhat dependent and somewhat sulky. Either way, it was the calculated way that a child gathered people's attention. But an unpleasant sensation ran down Kyousuke's spine when he realized what she meant.
Olivia remained pure and innocent as she continued.
And she showed no concern for the bright thighs visible below the short skirt and floral pattern pareo as they fluttered in the explosive blasts.
"When fighting using the Summoning Ceremony, you need to make sure you don't get normal people involved. If necessary, you try to drive them away

and cut them off from the dangerous battlefield. These are allll rules you followed, Onii-chan."
So she had done it.
She had "erased" the normal people from the battlefield.
"You're insane, Olivia…!!"
"Not necessarily."
Surprisingly, it was Meinokawa Aoi who interrupted while using her own body to protect Kyousuke and Biondetta from the rocket blasts. Her pulse did not feel at all artificial as she pressed it up against the other two.
"This Houbi land is the combat village ruled by the Meinokawa summoner bloodline. This area is known for its underground ice rooms, but they are all connected to form a giant network of tunnels. They will not be buried alive there unless the enemy uses one of those…*bun-ker bus-ters*? Or whatever they are called."
"But only a fraction of them can use those, right!? Aren't most of them normal people with no connection to the world of the Summoning Ceremony!?"
"They can be guided. Normal people lose their memories of summoners and vessels once we are no longer in their field of vision, but it is up to their individual nature how their mind maintains consistency. So if we arrange things in a suggestive fashion, they will subconsciously choose to evacuate *whenever anything odd happens*."
"Hee hee hee. Isn't that great, Onii-chan? If this wasn't Houbi Village, you'd have to give up your title as the king of not killing."
"…"
This had all been so she could say that one thing.
"But that does not mean we can just laugh it off and forgive her," said Aoi. "She also ruined the festival."
"Oh, c'mon. All I'm thinking about is how to bring the Queen and Onii-chan together in my own way. Why would I need anyone's permission to do that?"
No, that was also why Bridesmaid and the White Queen had joined forces with Olivia Highland, a girl he had once saved.
…It was all to utterly destroy the "safe zone" that Shiroyama Kyousuke had believed in.
They had made a mess of the smiles he had seen here and the preparations for the small festival that the village had been looking forward to.
The problem was just how well they knew each other. It would be difficult to find an attack so grand and wasteful that simultaneously tore into Kyousuke's heart with such pinpoint precision.
"But, Onii-chan, now you can't run away, can you? I got rid of all the buildings you might have hidden behind and there isn't a forest of people you can disappear into either."
"Olivia…"

“Summoning Ceremony battles are somewhat reliant on the terrain, so now we can fight on even footing. Now, Onii-chan, let’s enjoy this fight now that there’s *no one left* to interfere.”
“Olivia
Highlaaa

She chose the obvious course of action based on those facts: shoot the girl immediately before her summoner can arrive.
Biondetta's waitress-style miniskirt fluttered up as she prepared her folded Blood-Sign which doubled as a bolt-action sniper rifle. And she could pull the trigger far faster than someone could throw an Incense Grenade. It was a sniper rifle, but she raised it like a pistol in a Western quick-draw scene and her trigger finger was already moving.
Even if the girl was a vessel, a human was a human.
If she had yet to join with her summoner and invite a Material inside herself, the little subcutaneous fat of her undeveloped bodylines could not deflect a rifle bullet. The lead weapon used its own rapid rotation to stabilize itself and it would swiftly crush and wreak havoc on the Olivia's internals as it mercilessly pierced through her.
However…
"Stop that. She's just a child. How immature of you."
"!? Oh, honestly!!"
A slender hand casually reached in from the side, grabbed Biondetta's gun and pointed it straight up. The culprit was Meinokawa Aoi. The movement of her sleeve pulled on the chest of her shrine maiden outfit, causing it to jiggle, and then the bullet flew through the evening sky like a warning shot.
Excellent accuracy was the selling point for bolt-action weapons, but they were hopelessly unsuited for rapid-fire because the cocking lever had to be pulled for each and every shot.
The look in Kyousuke's eyes grew even sharper.
"Biondetta! *You*!!"
"Eek! Does this mean you're going to insist on a late-night talking-to!? First I fail to finish off my target and now I have to sit through a lecture!? This really is the worst!!"
Just as the contracted demon shouted in desperation, the many white Repliglass craft skimmed by a lot like giant sports kites. Shiroyama Kyousuke was an obvious target, but they moved to suppress the entire village instead, so they may have also wanted to collect the documents and equipment related to the Meinokawa Shrine.
Meinokawa Aoi held ancient knowledge on how to create artificial vessels, but she would need a manufacturing facility to give that information physical form.
"Whoops."
Olivia belatedly held down her straw hat and miniskirt as the artificial wind blew through.
Once the Repliglass group had passed by as a white wind, something unfamiliar had joined the scorched and hellish landscape.
A man of nearly 2m stood next to the 135cm girl.
It was late July and the first day of summer break, but he ignored all of that to wear a black riding suit and a lab coat. But the most conspicuous part was the full-face helmet like a fighter pilot might wear. It included an

oxygen inhaler which was connected to the wheeled oxygen tank lying at his feet like a suitcase.
Kyousuke had no idea who he was.
But he could make a pretty good guess based on the spear-like object longer than he was tall.
It was an excessively-long Japanese sword and sheath held closed by rusted wire like a faucet during a water conservation period.
It looked something like a single long rod.
It was a Blood-Sign.
“Now, shall we get started, Onii-chan?”
The girl freed her skinny arms.
Olivia Highland giggled and stepped closer to the man who was nearly twice her height. Summoners were the backstage performers who ensured the vessel could make their greatest performance while calling a god down onto the stage. This was the practical form linked to her *origin*.
“I’ll show you allll sorts of great things about the White Queen!!”

Part 4

Kyousuke had announced his intention to kill the White Queen.
He had expected to run into Bridesmaid since they worshiped the Queen over anything else in the world.
But as he pulled his Repliglass Blood-Sign from his back, a certain phrase came to mind.
(I need to fix this little by little. If I do what they want, things will only get worse!!)
To be blunt, his group gained nothing from fighting Olivia.
Their goal was to learn from Meinokawa Aoi and acquire an artificial vessel that suited their purposes.
And yet the situation was rapidly headed toward battle.
Win or lose, they took damage just from taking part. It would tear their schedule to shreds.
They did not have time for a strategy meeting with the enemy right in front of them. Biondetta made complex movements using the artificial bones inside her dominant hand in order to communicate with Kyousuke.
(Let’s throw our Incense Grenades simultaneously. They must not want to let us build up our Cost using Chains because they haven’t surrounded us with summoners. It’s two-against-one, so we have the advantage and we need to use it!!)
Kyousuke had no objection to that plan.

Alice (with) Rabbit pulled a metal can the size of a hairspray can from his hoodie pocket, pulled the pin, and threw it. Liar Cat spread her legs and a sphere a bit smaller than a baseball fell from her waitress-style miniskirt.
Even if one was deflected, the other would detonate.
The standard for a group battle was to trap your target in your own Artificial Sacred Ground.
And that was what should have happened.
However.
It was a pristine sound, as if from a metal wind chime.
By the time the vibrations had propagated through the air, the change had already arrived.
“A cut…!?”
A slight vertical cut ran through the very bottom of the miniskirt and the tool she had supposedly dropped between her legs was cleanly destroyed.
Even Biondetta felt her throat grew so dry she could barely force her voice out through it. The Incense Grenade was sliced apart as easily as a piece of fruit. And with enough accuracy to remove the fuse, preventing it from detonating.
Aoi brought a hand to her mouth in surprise, pushing up on her soft breasts in the process.
“Even with Incense Grenades thrown in two different directions, that helmeted man not only sliced through them but defused them as well!?”
That 2m Japanese sword had supposedly been held in place with wire, but the strength of his thumb had been enough to forcibly break that wire and release the seal.
It had been an *iai* strike.[1]
Without losing any momentum, he had smoothly made a second and third sword strike. Just like a roller coaster endlessly switching between kinetic energy and potential energy, the faceless man’s sword edge never came to a stop. After the storm of flowing silver lines was released from the sheath, it could not have been even two seconds before it was returned to the sheath.
And that frightening sword edge would be able to target more than just Incense Grenades.
In general, an Incense Grenade’s timed fuse took 3-5 seconds to detonate. Against this lab coat and riding suit man, those few seconds seemed to stretch out into an eternity. It was hardly surprising that Biondetta and Meinokawa Aoi decided their best course of action was to immediately move back to put some distance between them and wielder of that long weapon.
But the boy chose the exact opposite path.
Shiroyama Kyousuke adjusted his grip on his similarly long Blood-Sign and charged forcefully in toward the man.
The previously pristine sound grew distorted.
It was not the man’s blade that Kyousuke’s Blood-Sign had caught. He refused to even let the man remove the sword from its sheath, so he had caught the wrist of the hand holding the hilt.

“The weakness of longer weapons is the range you need.”
He approached to just a dozen or so centimeters away and they both poured all their strength into their respective weapons.
“And it’s even worse with a sword since you can’t move your hand up the shaft like you can with a spear or *naginata*. So it’s actually safer to move in close.”
That was as far as he got.
The supposedly-restrained helmeted man turned his body even further. That freed his arm from the Blood-Sign and pulled Kyousuke’s wrist forward as he tried to pursue it. When using *iai* techniques to kill instead of as a performance, this was a recovery technique for when your sheath or hilt was captured.
He did not rotate his hips to shift his entire body weight. He only used the strength of his arms. And there was not much actual power contained in the movement.
But Kyousuke’s body flipped quite dramatically. He had been forced to do it himself to escape the pain in his wrist joint. This was an *aikido* style throw that used the bare minimum of strength to control your opponent.
However…
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not bat an eye even as he was flipped upside down.
Had the man failed to notice his expression because they were too close for his eyes to focus properly?
Kyousuke’s flipping body obscured the lab coat and riding suit man’s vision and he moved to the side as guided by the man’s recovery technique.
And once he was out of the way, the helmeted man saw something else instead: Biondetta’s bolt-action sniper rifle.
A dry blast rang out.
The recoil ran violently through the alluring body contained in the waitress uniform.
The fact that the man managed to draw the blade and block the rifle proved his skill really was the best of the best.
But this was not a battle between a blade and a bullet.
It was a battle between summoners who fought by calling in otherworldly beings.
They had only needed to stop the man’s movement for just a moment.
Even as he was thrown into a side flip and out of the way, Kyousuke stuck his left hand in his pocket and tossed out the metal can found inside.
He had already been outside the swordsman summoner’s focus.
And he had also tensed up due to the knockback from the rifle bullet.
The silver flashes would return a moment later, but that brief pause had killed the speed of proper *iai*. It was only by some miniscule fraction of a second, but he was too slow all the same.
The blade did dig into the surface of the metal can.
But that was when it detonated.

The mixture of herbs and minerals was arranged differently for every summoner, but that incense now spread out and surrounded a 20m cube to cut it off from the rest of the world.
A stock of three white balls of light known as White Thorns appeared near Kyousuke, Biondetta, and the helmeted man, a Rose created from 6x6x6 red balls of light known as Petals appeared in the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground, and 36 Spots opened all across that space.
“We finally cleared step one…”
The first one to hit a White Thorn with their Blood-Sign was Biondetta who had moved away and was thus free to act.
“…But we’ll have the upper hand once I summon a Material!!”
The sword user cut at Kyousuke to force him to block with his Blood-Sign and launched a White Thorn while Kyousuke was knocked back. But in the meantime, Biondetta’s White Thorn caused the Rose to burst and the red Petals scattered every which way. She really was the fastest one. Several Petals fell into the Spots and the white snake vessel transformed into a Material.
Sound Range: High. Cost: 6.
Predatory Fire (l v z – w z b).
Seeing as Olivia’s side only had the Original Yellow (s), a slime of Cost 1 from the high Sound Range, their plan had paid off. This was an overwhelming advantage. They were the same Sound Range with a Cost difference of 5. There was no way Biondetta could lose.
But Kyousuke felt a chill down his spine.
That line. Biondetta’s words. He felt like the pupa of hopeless slaughter was waiting to spread its wings…
“Wait, Biondetta…”
Then it hit him and he called out to her.
“Don’t let your guard down!! This isn’t over yet!!”
“?”
He did not get through to her.
Biondetta gave him a puzzled look just before it happened.
There was a cost difference of 5.
They were both at the same Sound Range, so that would not have played a role.
“…Eh?”
Biondetta’s eyes opened wide, like she was viewing something truly unbelievable.
The translucent yellow slime’s body had burst straight through the pulsing central weak point of Biondetta’s supposedly stronger Material.
It had broken through the Silhouette.
That was the Material’s weak point where the vessel’s mind resided.
That blatantly-displayed weak point was never taken advantage of because not even the chosen vessel could fully control the Material. The best they

could hope for was to just barely keep the rampaging targeting cursor on the target, so precise targeting was no more than a hopeless dream.
(The Third Summoning Ceremony refers to a contract bound between humans and Materials.)
And yet.
The enemy had done it.
(So the exact classification and definition of “human” becomes an issue. The more accurately a vessel can indicate what a “human” is, the clearer the Material can perceive them and the greater they synchronize. And that binds them more closely together. That is why shrine maidens and holy women cut themselves off from worldly impurities to preserve their purity, and that is why there are traditions of finding special meaning in the structure of the human body itself, such as a sage’s skeletal structure or the Adam Kadmon. While you can be taught to be a summoner, being a vessel is mostly reliant on inborn talent. There are natural ones like Meinokawa Higan and Sekurtiti and there are created ones like Isabelle who had her soul artificially worn away and Lu-san whose family is searching for the perfect form of mankind. And the greatest one I’ve ever seen is…)
The small vessel before his eyes right now.
As a vessel with royal blood, royal flesh, and a royal soul, Olivia Highland could fully control her Material.
“Kah.”
And no matter how it had happened, there was only one result once the Material had been defeated.
The defeated summoner and vessel would be hit by a shock equivalent to seeing their god slaughtered before their eyes.
“Kahahhh!!!???”
As soon as everything burst and the white snake was released into the world once more, Biondetta arched her back. As if she had been hit by a stun gun in the back, she could not close her gaping mouth and she collapsed to her knees.
Even so, this would never have happened to Biondetta normally. At Freedom’s 900 level and as an actively scheming demon, she would have immediately picked up on the scent of her opponent trying some kind of trick and she would have put up her guard.
It was obvious what had dulled her senses.
(That summoner was trying to prevent us from using the Summoning Ceremony, so she assumed victory was ours as soon as the Incense Grenade detonated. *Even though there was nothing at all to suggest that.* They placed a nonexistent borderline in her mind and launched a surefire attack in the instant she crossed it and relaxed. Olivia, when did you get so clever!?)
The yellow slime turned to face him.
A Material was normally a mass of fighting instincts, but this one came to a stop even though Kyousuke had yet to summon a Material and thus gain a

protective circle. It was like a rider holding their trusty steed's reins and ordering it to wait. That alone proved just how extraordinary Olivia's talent was.
She had overcome a Cost difference of 5 for an instant kill, so even if Kyousuke summoned a Cost 1 member of the Original Series and tried to build his Material up from there, Olivia would kill it before he got anywhere.
And even after all this, Olivia may not have been satisfied. She had said she wanted to show off all sorts of great things about the White Queen, so she did not seem to want a quick end to the battle.
But then…
"I see."
The silver-haired shrine maiden sighed in a mixture of exasperation and awe.
She held her own head between her soft hands, but it did not look like her mind was ruled by agony. She also gave her partner a glimpse of her defenseless armpit through the opened shoulder of her clothing.
"So this is the cutting-edge form of the Blood-Sign method. And it would seem you have developed some secret techniques not even I am familiar with. But if you are going to cheat, then you can't complain when I do the same, can you? I have had far more than enough time to sit around and think while being used as a shrine god."
As soon as she said that, something happened.
She used her hands to pull off her own head. It came off far too easily.
The action was as casual as removing a full-face helmet.
And with her head missing, Meinokawa Aoi held the removed head to her surprisingly large chest and spoke.
"Now, a question. Girl, where do you think the human soul resides? In the brain? Or maybe in the heart? But the answer doesn't actually matter. I am a fully artificial vessel, so I am not actually a living creature. In other words, I have no center point. That is an extremely important fact."
Olivia had become the Material, so she could not actually speak.
But even if she had a mouth with which to speak, would she have tried to communicate with Aoi?
"Since I have no center, where will the Material reside if I split my body in two within the Artificial Sacred Ground? In the brain, or the heart? As I said, I do not have the center point you call a soul. Now, will the Material choose correctly? Or will it choose wrong? Or will it be unable to choose just one and be torn in two to reside in both halves? What matters here is that the Summoning Ceremony is the modern version of the extremely dangerous ceremony used to call down the gods. If you keep that in mind, I think it should be obvious what is about to happen."
She was plotting something.
Knowing that must have been enough because the Original Yellow moved swiftly. It moved to eliminate Meinokawa Aoi who was producing dissonance.

But it was just a moment too late.
“If the margin of error grows beyond the tolerable limit, the contradiction cannot be contained and *the ceremony will fail*. It does not matter what Material you have or how long until the proper end. It will be immediately canceled, the Artificial Sacred Ground will collapse, and we will regain our freedom.”
It was like a giant balloon popping. The pull of gravity vanished from Kyousuke’s feet. By the time he realized he had been blown away by an invisible explosion, he had been knocked quite a ways backwards. And he was not the only one. The same had happened to all of those arrogant enough to take part in the Summoning Ceremony and insolently wield a higher power.
The summoning had failed.
This never should have happened in the modern age of the Third Summoning Ceremony.
“I may only be an artificial lookalike, but do not forget that I am a shrine god who has long listened to people’s prayers and warded off evil, you fools. If I was going to give up on someone’s life just because that life is not my own, I would never have been worshiped by the people in the first place.”
Kyousuke took the full brunt of the magical reaction and rolled across the scorched paddy field. The core of his spine ached from the pain he never should have experienced as the successful one.
“Kah…hah…???”
He groaned on the ground and nearly forgot how to breathe, but it could have been worse. *He would have been hit by far more had he already summoned a Material.* Then he heard a rustling sound. He looked over while holding his throat and saw Meinokawa Aoi looking down at him with her head reattached and unconscious Biondetta held under one arm.
The silver-haired girl needlessly pushed her chest out, causing that portion of her shrine maiden outfit to swell out.
“Honestly. Back before the convenient Blood-Sign method, magicians said you only counted as a proper beginner once you could eliminate the reaction assaulting your body. I feel like I’m looking at a chef who specializes in using a peeler and doesn’t actually know how to use a knife.”
From Kyousuke’s perspective, that sounded like trying surgery using the techniques from a time when no one knew to sterilize their tools. Attempting a few reckless stunts was not at all useful when standing on the modern front line where common knowledge had been entirely rewritten.
Regardless, Aoi herself was entirely unaffected.
“As I don’t have a soul, I can’t think of anything within me that could be shaken by that shock. That means this kind of reaction can’t damage me. You should be thankful the Joruri Method can cheat like this. Let’s get out of here while they’re knocked out.”
“Kh…”

Once she grabbed Kyousuke's arm and forced him to his feet, he kept his unsteady body standing and looked around the area. Olivia Highland and the helmeted man were indeed collapsed on the burnt paddy field.
"Hey, we don't have time to carry an extra burden," said Aoi. "I'm sure more of them will be after us soon. If we don't get out of here, they'll capture and interrogate…no, torture you."
"…"
"C'mon already. Besides, that would be suicide if she swallowed a homing beacon. I don't know if you're planning to stick your hand down her throat or up her ass, but can you really search the inside of her body right away?"
"…"
"Oh, come on! Come oooon!!"
"…"
Kyousuke ignored her as he moved his unsteady body and scooped up Olivia's small frame in his arms. The straw hat girl was not even 135cm tall, but she felt as heavy as a weightlifting barbell to Kyousuke at the moment. Even so, he picked her up.
He had a reason to do so.
He had once bound a contract with her, saying he would save her.
(Olivia seems to be in the same state as anyone who loses. That means she'll be like this for 24 hours. I'm really glad that happened *before* I summoned a Material.)
"Okay. Let's get out of here, Meinokawa Aoi."
"Fine then, you kidnapper. Quit acting like some kind of hero, you pervert. But looking at her again, that is quite the getup that brat is wearing."
"She was born in the landlocked Kingdom F, so she had never visited the beach. She had this weird obsession with Japan's swimsuits and the idea of swimming in the ocean."
18,000 rockets had leveled the village and then a great number of summoners and Repliglass soldiers had landed. It was best to assume Houbi Village had fallen into Bridesmaid's hands, but while the outsiders would be using satellite photographs and map data, Meinokawa Aoi knew the land inside and out. There was no hesitation in her step, so she likely already had a destination in mind.
Her scent and warmth were just like that of a human.
Kyousuke made a comment while following her.
"The Joruri Method can cheat, huh?"
"All *cam-er-uh*s and *sen-ser*s cease to function inside an Artificial Sacred Ground, so it's already cheating that an artificial summoner or vessel can do anything inside there."
"That's true enough, but…no soul?"
"Yes. Is that a problem?"
"…But Meinokawa Renge was affected by the penalty when she lost. She was hit by the shock equivalent to seeing her god slaughtered before her eyes. That would mean she has something inside her that can be shaken."

“I see.”
While placing limp Biondetta over her back, the very first Joruri Method gave a dry smile.
“Then it would seem future generations have gained some functions I lack. Now I’m jealous.”

Part 5

Freedom 903 was in a sorry state.
Kyousuke breathed the scorched air while carrying the small girl he had once fought alongside.
It felt like a warzone.
Nothing remained of Houbi Village and its refreshing breeze.
“…Dammit.”
“Do not let it bother you. That child’s evil actions are not your fault.”
“No, I should have predicted this. Given how obsessed with me Bridesmaid and the White Queen are, I should have considered the possibility that they would also become a threat to people I know.”
This went beyond Olivia Highland.
He pictured the Alices he had saved either in the past or by altering causality.
Librarian-chan and her sister, Isabelle and Murasame Kuina, Himekawa Mika and Ellie Slide, Sekurtiti and Azalea, Meinokawa Renge and Higan, and all of those before then. All of those people had paved his way to 903 Awards.
Just because they had not been targeted yet was no guarantee they never would be.
“If you ask me, they might have been intentionally left alone,” said Aoi while carrying Biondetta whose body was defenselessly sprawled out.
“…What?”
“Do not feel bad. Because I am a lookalike for the Queen, I feel like I can understand how she thinks to a certain extent. Yes, I simply feel like I can.”
The silver-haired shrine maiden sighed.
She was still carrying Biondetta over her back, so the two girls’ cheeks were rubbing together.
“What a girl in love fears more than anything else is being ignored. And on that front, you are very easy to manipulate. I mean, you have announced you refuse to let anyone die, so it’s obvious from the start what someone has to do to get your attention.”
“…”

“From the very beginning, you’ve displayed the one weakness you can never ignore. If someone dreaming of you is ever feeling uncertain, it goes without saying what she needs to do to put her mind at ease, right?”
Did that mean those girls would not have been targeted if Kyousuke was not “like this”?
Did that mean the best possible path Kyousuke had thought up had actually directly led to this hell on earth?
“That’s ridiculous…”
“Indeed. But we can view this in a positive light. If the White Queen is playing one of the cards she had held in reserve, it means she is feeling the pressure. In other words, she feels the need to shake you using one of her trump cards.”
While they held their conversation, Meinokawa Aoi guided him to an irrigation ditch dividing the paddies. This should have been in clear view of the satellites overhead, but there were a few exceptions.
For example, below an intersection with the ocean embankment.
When Kyousuke peered inside the round opening using his smartphone’s LED light, he saw a rusted and broken grating with water falling even further down through it. It was not a problem for Kyousuke and Aoi, but if a small child like Olivia followed her curiosity and crawled inside, she might end up trapped.
There were numerous cracks, but the tunnel had not collapsed even after the downpour of rockets. Even with the disaster-prevention embankment so close by, it was unnaturally sturdy for a civilian structure.
“You can get underground from almost anywhere here. Burning a few scorch marks on the ground isn’t enough for this Houbi land to collapse.”
With Biondetta still on her back, the silver-haired shrine maiden freed one of her hands and waved her slender finger. “Since you’re in contact with Renge of this generation, I assume you understand the Meinokawa Shrine’s situation. Including the fact that Guard of Honor came to steal the Joruri Text.”
“You mean…?”
“They eventually managed to get it due to the gambling debt, but there were a few largescale attacks before that. With the Toy Dream policy underway in various remote rural regions, no one cares much about a poor, declining village. This is not the first time that this Houbi land was destroyed. Rebuilding afterwards is our way. It’s like a filming set for the silver screen.”
Was that why the Meinokawa Shrine’s wood had smelled surprisingly new for such an old building? They had perfectly recreated it, including intentionally damaging the wood and adding moss.
“We are a tough people both inside and out. And that includes Renge and Higan. So don’t worry about it too much.”
“…But if you can get in from anywhere, won’t Bridesmaid notice the underground tunnels too?”

“They will of course find an entrance or two. But the inside is a complex three-dimensional labyrinth and their *sat-a-lite fotos* and *map daytuh* will not be of any use. It will take them ages to map it all out themselves.”
“Could they smoke everyone out with poison gas or flamethrowers?”
“It is possible, but we can switch between several patterns for the wind direction inside the tunnels. By determining the routes through which air can travel, we can keep the damage to a minimum even if they send poison in through an entrance.”
It did not matter that they were wearing sneakers and leather boots. They stepped into the source of the unpleasant mixture of a muddy and salty smell and let their feet sink into the sludge as they trudged on. They saw a few branching tunnels that were protected by metal grating, but one of those had a door locked with a chain and combination lock.
“Um, what was the combination again…? N-no! It isn’t that I’ve forgotten!! Don’t treat me like an old lady!!”
“I didn’t say anything. Now move out of the way.”
Aoi hopped up and down, causing a variety of jiggling, and made a preemptive denial while blushing, but Kyousuke pushed her aside and grabbed the longish combination lock. He set all of the 8 digits and then unlocked it.
“Huh? How did you do that???”
“That’s the kind of world this is.”
Kyousuke began to think this might also prevent any harm even if Bridesmaid used poison gas. Anything inorganic was not real threat. As everyone fled through the complex arrangement of tunnels, *they would just so happen to make the correct choice.*
(On the other hand, things could get very bad very quickly if they have actual people perform a direct search. *They might miraculously find the villagers right away*.)
“What do we do now?”
“Those…*Bridez-made*? Anyway, those people with a Western name are Queen worshipers, right? To be honest, this isn’t looking good. I don’t know how skilled you are, but I doubt we can push them back in a direct confrontation. It would be a lot of work with little excitement, so it would be boring and a pain to go along with.”
“Well, I suppose so.”
To reiterate, Kyousuke’s group gained nothing from fighting that Queen-worshiping cult. It would not help them complete the trump card the boy had in mind. Win or lose, they would lose something if they were caught in a battle with that pain-in-the-ass group.
Unfortunately, Bridesmaid was not taking their circumstances into consideration.
“Now, it’s about time we got serious. Even if the role was forced onto me, I am a shrine god and I must protect the people of Houbi Village.”
“And how will you do that?”

Meinokawa Aoi shifted defenseless Biondetta's position on her back as she answered Kyousuke's question.
"They worship the White Queen, so let's break that mental pillar and bring them to a state of apathy. The best course of action is to construct your method of killing the Queen and shove that blade toward the Queen's throat."
"…"
"Even with the appropriate knowledge and technique, you cannot acquire an artificial vessel with special artificial blood in its veins if we do not have a workshop to give it physical form. But how many such workshops do you think are hidden in this village? …Well, let's just say that *Bridez-made* cannot find them all if they cannot even grasp the full scope of these underground tunnels."
(…Artificial blood, hm?)
That term had not come up before, so Kyousuke made sure to make a mental note of it.
They could not see the stars in the narrow underground tunnel, but Kyousuke's sense of direction told him they were generally moving from the ocean to the mountain.
"A cruise ship has been abandoned at the top of the mountain. It is called the St. Elmo."
"At the top of the mountain? Why???"
"It was originally used for leisurely cruises in the crater lake, but an earthquake created a deep crack in the lake bottom. It dried up and now only the ship remains."
"So is that the workshop?"
"One of them, yes. Even if *Bridez-made* breaks into a government office *daytuh-bays*, they shouldn't find anything if they only check for 'buildings'."
Whether or not something showed up in a search could sometimes lead you astray far more than whether or not that thing was visible. Of course, they would likely discover it if they spent months performing a thorough search, but Kyousuke and Bridesmaid were in the middle of a blitzkrieg where speed was everything. Kyousuke would not give them the time.
After they continued on for a while, their surroundings began to change. The sewer-ish smell vanished and the plain concrete walls and floor were replaced by the smooth curves of a limestone cave. Rather than developing the area according to a blueprint, they had apparently forcibly connected the tunnel to a nearby cave. It felt a lot like a sightseeing cave.
(Since the awful smell hasn't gotten in here, she might have been right about their ability to control the flow of air to fight against smoke and poison gas.)
While thinking about that, they climbed the gradual slope of the limestone cave. Perhaps because it was so damp, none of the evacuees were gathered here. Closed environments helped mold spores harm people's lungs and mouths, so that dampness could not be taken lightly.

“Phew. I’m soaked just from all this walking.”
“…”
“Hey, quit thinking and try blushing a little. A young maiden’s clothing is all wet and see-through. And I can’t cover up while carrying this summoner.”
“I’m glad to see the Joruri Method has more horsepower than a normal person.”
“Nn, mhhh!!”
For some reason, Aoi puffed out her cheeks as the two of them continued on.
That reaction was less like an old lady and more like a little sister who was ignored after putting on a show of as much sexiness as she could manage.
Once they arrived at the edge of a large underground lake with a metal bridge across it, the unpleasant moisture soaking their hair and skin had vanished. This area seemed to be well ventilated.
“…This would be a good place to rest.”
“Oh, I see! So wet clothing just wasn’t good enough for you. You were waiting until you could see a girl bathing. I have to admire your dedication, you utter pervert!!”
“That nonsense aside, we need some place to set down Olivia and Biondetta.”
“Just as a warning, it is quite rude to not bat an eye when faced with a defenseless girl.”
He already knew from his experience with the true white evil that this kind of idiot would only look at you like an idiot if you idiotically did what they claimed to want.
The underground lake’s water was probably used to create a division between the cave system’s currents and moisture. And the area around the lake was not entirely cut off from human civilization because, after taking a short walk, they discovered a small shrine-like wooden building. It did not seem religious and they found several blankets and camping goods in plastic packaging inside.
There was also some portable food on the level of canned goods.
“This is surprisingly gourmet. There’s rice and freeze-dried vegetables that only need hot water. And all sorts of seasonings too.”
“Well, it takes a lot for salt or soy sauce to go bad.”
Aoi must not have liked how her damp leather boots felt because she stripped them off. All of the supplies were carefully packaged, but that was likely to prevent snakes or bats from getting into them. However, Kyousuke was less interested in the oddly unique options than he was in the world-famous cup noodles.
“…This is an incredibly outdoorsy selection.”
“Well, in this rural area, there isn’t much else to look forward to. And look at this lineup: if they weren’t going all out, there wouldn’t be so many options.”

From the looks of this, the entire three-dimensional labyrinth might have similar supply areas just like the pay phones and vending machines that never seemed to entirely go away. Instead of preparing with a specific threat in mind, it felt more like they had been having fun turning it into something like a secret base.
(I wouldn't be surprised to find traps that send boulders rolling down slopes or levers that change waterways.)
Kyousuke prepared himself for the worst when it came to that slight "playful spirit" he sensed here.
At any rate, they finally managed to let Olivia and Biondetta rest while defenseless both inside and out. As Aoi had said, their hair and clothing were quite wet just from the dampness of the cave. Olivia's school swimsuit had grown a deeper shade of blue. After lowering the two girls onto the wooden floor, Kyousuke and Aoi broke open the clear packaging and pulled out a few blankets.
"The losers can't resist anything, so if we leave them be, they could catch cold or even come down with pneumonia."
"I'm aware of that," said Kyousuke. "But if we lit a fire inside here, it would cause carbon monoxide poisoning. That means we need to remove their wet clothing to dry them off."
"Now, then. I'll leave the decision to you, but who will dry off who? Choose, boy. Face the abyss within yourself: A flat chest or giant boobs. I am willing to let you enjoy your fetish. Hah hah!!"
"…"
"…Okay, okay. I'll do both of them. I'll be a good girl."
"Dry off Biondetta's white snake too. Be extra careful with it since it's cold blooded."
When Kyousuke put his hands on his hips and glared at her, Meinokawa Aoi shrank down. After tossing his vessel a towel, the boy left the shrine(?).
As far as he could see, there was no sign of Bridesmaid summoners or Repliglass soldiers hiding in the area. Even by the large underwater lake, there were only so many passageways leading here, so he considered setting up a simple trap.
Given the large space and the excellent ventilation, he figured he could start a fire next to the lake.
(That said, that's only if we decide to wait around here.)
It was an entirely unnecessary action, but Kyousuke picked up a nearby stone and threw it toward the vast lake.
(20 times.)
After making a prediction, he counted the number of times the stone skipped off the water's surface.
(19 times.)
He made sure it was not just a coincidence.
(23 times.)
He finally breathed an exasperated sigh.

Kyousuke had not thrown the stone after making every last physics calculation like Laplace's Demon. He had intentionally omitted all calculations in order to prove something.

"…Honestly, this is one hell of a world. It's like I can manipulate coincidence."

And this was no time to be doing that.

At the moment, he had two major choices available to him.

The first was to wait for Olivia and Biondetta to recover so they could replenish their fighting force before continuing on to the cruise ship at the mountain's peak. Olivia was technically not an ally, but having to carry her around and having her walk on her own two feet would make a major difference.

The second was to not wait for them to recover and start for the cruise ship right away.

Simply put, it was a choice between speed and caution. The pros and cons of both went without saying.

"Heyyy!"

Aoi walked over from the double doors of the shrine(?).

She had apparently finished drying off the two defenseless girls, getting them dressed again, and placing the blankets over them.

"The sun has likely set outside, so it wouldn't hurt to fill our bellies."

"?"

He realized Aoi was holding some cup noodles and freeze-dried foods against her surprisingly ample chest.

"Um, just out of curiosity…Renge could eat like normal, but what about you?"

"Have you not seen 'inside' Renge? Just because we use artificial parts doesn't mean our body is structured any differently. If we are injured, we bleed red. If we move around a lot, we get hungry. I like to have more than 30 minutes of exercise a day to stay healthy and I ideally get 8 hours of sleep a day. Although since I am artificial, I can switch all that activity on and off."

"Oh? So you're like a dried-up human water bear."

"You just pictured something incredibly pathetic just now, didn't you!? Toryahh!!"

Out of nowhere, Meinokawa Aoi made a strange cry, threw her hands into the air, and collapsed backwards into the clear water.

"What are you doing!? This is kind of an emergency situation!"

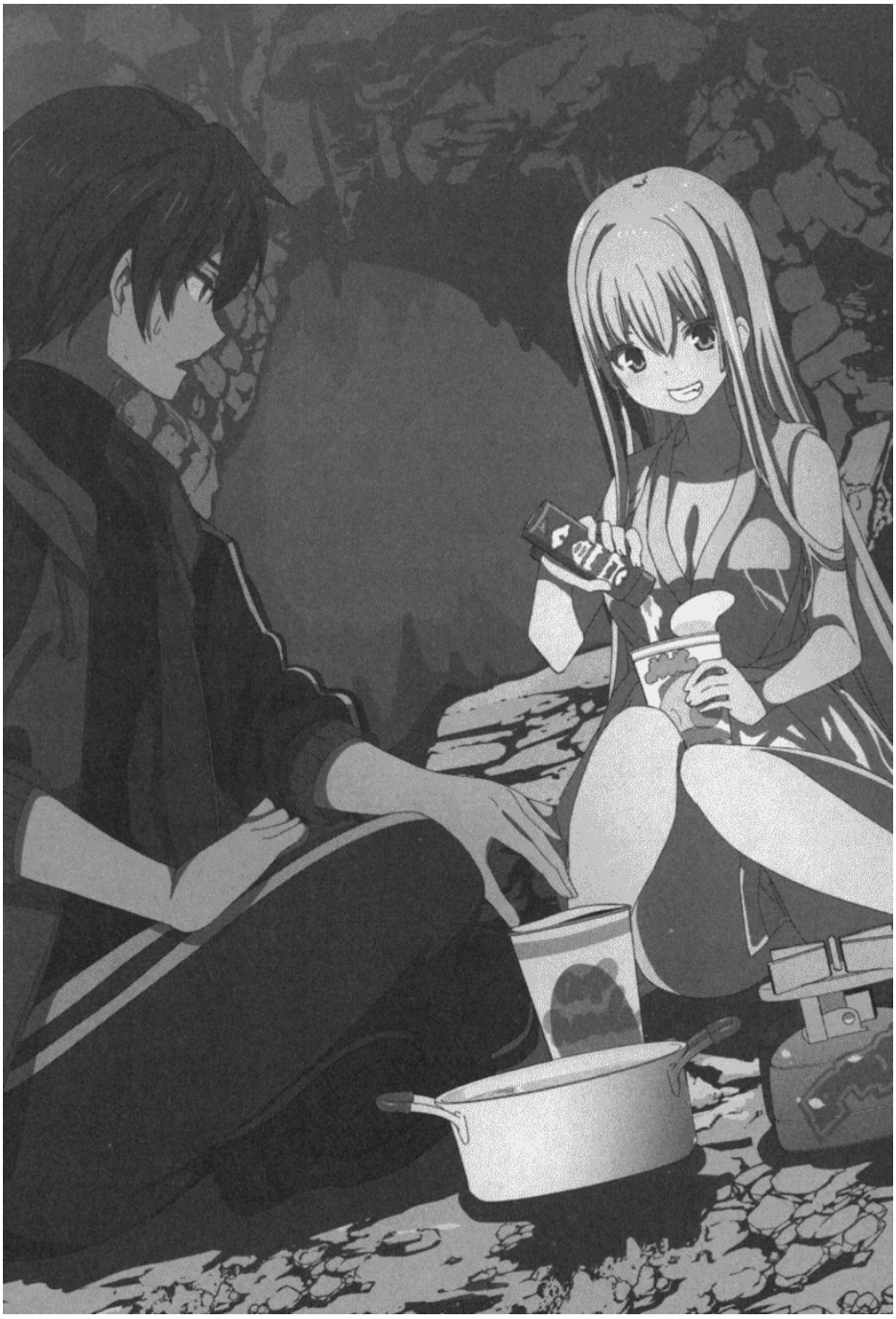
"Oh, shut up! An impertinent brat called me a dried-up old hag, so I'm just hydrating myself is all! Besides, I was already wet from all this moisture. What does a little more matter?"

The lake was not all that deep right at the shore, so Aoi sat up and laughed. Some of the clear water pooled up on the surprisingly large chest of her shrine maiden outfit.

“How about you? Build up too much stress and it will affect your performance, so it might be a good idea to blow off some steam.”
“…Then could you please try harder to avoid *giving* me any stress in the first place?” Kyousuke brought an exasperated hand to his forehead. “And this is the same as when you played in the river. It’s the wet clothing that’s bothering me.”
“Mwa ha ha. And what if I said I was doing it on purpose?”
“…”
“Keh heh heh. I’m joking,” said Meinokawa Aoi as she trudged back over to him. “Quit taking everything so seriously. It’s stifling.”
It was not that he maintained an unshakable heart; he simply knew how to quickly recover when it was shaken. And that was not just splitting hairs because every little thing seemed to transform into a major event around her.
Meanwhile, Aoi stood on one leg, tilted her head to the right, and tapped her palm against the side of her head. She seemed to have water in her ear, but she did not seem to notice that her careless action also caused her surprisingly large breasts to move up and down.
“Yo…ho…Ah, that got it out. Hey, can we start a fire here?”
“I warned you. So are you getting chilled?”
“No. After letting dust gather on me for so long, I want to fill my belly for the first time in forever. And I can’t hold back any longer with those cup noodles right in front of me. Oh, I want some junk food so badly right now!”
“…Well, it is unlikely Bridesmaid will show up now.”
Aoi’s face lit up and she lined up her prizes along the edge of the lake.
“What, do you only have an oil lamp? A campfire would seem a lot more outdoorsy!”
“…You *are* freezing, aren’t you?”
“No, not really. Although I am soaked, so I could stand to let my clothes dry. Uryahh!!
She let out another strange cry.
And of all things, she reached for the string of her bright *hakama*[2] and undid the knot. From there, gravity did its job. To describe it with a sound effect, it fell right down with a “fwoosh”.
Unlike a normal *kimono*, it lacked a separate *obi*, but the *kosode*[3] being so wet paid off and the front remained in place and the collar stayed together. It may have been something like throwing a wet towel against the wall.
An incredibly grim look came to Shiroyama Kyousuke’s face.
“What are you doing?”
“Mwa ha ha. There’s no need to force that serious look. You’re secretly panicking because I already mentioned that girls in traditional clothing don’t wear Western underwear, aren’t you? But too bad! The *kosode* is made long, so you still can’t see anything!! Just like a girl in nothing but a baggy dress shirt!!”

“I can’t believe this. And come to think of it, I never asked Renge if you were waterproof. This is going to be a lot more difficult if all this water is making you malfunction.”
“Hold it! Why aren’t you blushing!?”
In her Japanese-style naked dress shirt(???), Meinokawa Aoi raised both arms in anger, but not even Kyousuke knew how he was supposed to react here.
Regardless, Aoi herself set her butt down on the ground, pouted her lips, and twisted the knob on the oil lamp that would boil water for them.
“Nn.”
“What’s that weird groan for? Did you get all sandy when you sat down?”
“I really don’t think you should take such a realistic view of a girl in nothing but a single piece of clothing!! And a proper woman knows how to protect herself without letting it show on her face!!”
“Except it’s most definitely showing. And the way you’re lifting your hips is about to let something else show, so fix that!!”
The collar was only plastered in place with the moisture, so it could open up at any moment.
And despite the conversation, they were not about to forget they stood on the front line of the Summoning Ceremony.
“Let me make something clear,” said Aoi.
“Yeah?”
“Even if that…Olivia, was it? Even if she comes to, it will not be easy to open her eyes to the truth when her faith in the Queen is so strong.”
“I’ve taken that into account.”
Meinokawa Aoi had created the shock of a failed summoning and it apparently put people in the same state as losing a Summoning Ceremony battle. That meant it would take about 24 hours before they recovered. Aoi had likely planned it this way, but Kyousuke’s side was fortunate that they had taken less damage due to not summoning a Material.
That gave them time to think.
“Oh, they had water bottles in there, didn’t they?” asked Kyousuke.
“This land is known for its water, so why not just drink from the lake?”
“Do you have any idea how much bacteria there must be in there? Even commercial mineral water is boiled and there might be germs that can resist the heat. We don’t have time to examine the water quality, so if there are bottles it’s best to just use it.”
“And judging what is going on inside that Olivia girl’s head would be even more difficult. Then again, she contains the royal blood that allows her to control the Materials with such incredible precision. To be honest, I am not fond of the idea that your bloodline determines everything before you are even born, but she would make for a powerful ally if she was fighting on our side. Of course, that’s only *if* we could convince her.”
“I know that.” A grim look came to Kyousuke’s face. “But we might be able to manage since this is Houbi Village. For that, I’m thankful.”

“?”
Aoi shook her long silver hair, walked back to the shrine(?), and returned with a family-sized water bottle held against her surprisingly ample chest. Since both her hands were full, she could not hold down the bottom of the *kosode* that showed off her thighs right up to the very top.
Once the shrine maiden sat down with only the *kosode* covering her butt, she poured the imported deep sea water into a metal pot from the camping goods.
“Now, I want to decide on a general plan,” said Kyousuke. “At the moment, we have two primary options.”
“Yes. I would like to head for the summit as soon as we finish eating this. This Houbi land has fallen to those *Bridez-made* people and the people cannot elude them forever. Our time limit is two or three days at the most, so there is no time to waste.”
“Really? I was hoping to suggest we wait for those two to recover.”
“And why is that?”
There was a wide variety of cup noodles, but Kyousuke chose the standard soy sauce flavor while Meinokawa Aoi chose the limited edition seafood tomato soup flavor.
“First of all, to increase our strength. Simply having Biondetta able to fight will mean a lot. And if those two can walk on their own, we won’t have to carry them.”



“Hmm. Sorry, but based on that battle, I’m not sure what help she would really be.”
“That was just a bad matchup for her.”
They pulled the lids of the cups halfway up and then Kyousuke froze in shocked silence. In nothing but a soaking wet *kosode*, Aoi sprinkled grated cheese into her container before even pouring the hot water inside.
“Why was there cheese in the disaster goods?”

“Why not? Fermented foods are generally preserved foods, right? Just like seasonings, it takes a lot for things like natto and kimchi to go bad. Hm, hm, hmm. There is nothing wrong with adding a hint of extra flavor, so it’s time you had a taste of a maiden’s aesthetics.”
“Maybe so, but you wouldn’t just leave yogurt sitting out, would you!?”
“What, have you never heard of *greke yo-gert*? Get with the times!!”
“You don’t store Greek yogurt at room temperature!”
The two of them continued bickering and fighting over each other’s toppings. Kyousuke was not too picky except when it came to cereal, but he needed to acquire the proper nutrients when he knew he had to fight. Simply put, he had to eat when he had the chance.
“Oh? Are you the kind of boy who knows his way around the kitchen?”
“I’m not an expert or anything, but I can handle it at the moment. Even without any special knowledge, everything will miraculously come together if I just choose at random.”
“?”
“It’s the same as that combination lock. This is a world where I can mix random drinks at the soda fountain and end up with the kind of success worth getting patented. As long as there’s at least one possible success among the random options, I’ll end up choosing that one. Of course, that’s only when I don’t come into conflict with someone else’s choices.”
As he explained, Kyousuke’s hand wandered about and grabbed something *at random*: a freeze-dried vegetable set. He poured hot water in there, set it back down, lightly cooked it in a frying pan, and mixed in some starch and water. All of it was simple enough for a child to do, but it ended up making his cup noodles *ankake*-style. It lacked meat, but he did not reach for the canned goods, perhaps because it would have clashed with the thick *tare* sauce.
Meanwhile, Aoi sat with her bare thighs placed in front of her.
“Hm, hm, hmm.”
“What are you doing with that rice? Surely you aren’t making ramen rice.”
“You fool. Have you forgotten my cup is already something of a mess with the grated *cheze* inside?”
“So you admit it’s a mess!?”
“But if I rehydrate the rice and dump it in…tah dah!! It transforms into something like a *rizo-to*!!”
“What the hell kind of food is that!? The noodles are extraneous at this point!! The cheese, soup, and rice would be enough!!”
But because of the world they now lived in, that too was a success.
The world was a complicated place.
“Hmm, it could use some more color. Oh, I know. There were some canned goods. Yes, there’s some salted chicken. That would be the perfect finishing touch!”
The lid had a pull tab, so Aoi did not need a can opener. Only after seeing that did Kyousuke realize there were cans with a non-*tare* sauce. He had

failed to properly look over everything because he was relying on the random choices like a book fortunetelling. The meat in cup noodles always made one wonder if it was really meat, so he was honestly jealous.
(Does that mean I can't choose any coincidental successes that weren't in the options I thought were possible?)
And…
"…Ow!"
"?"
"Uuuhh, I was caught by a fearsome trap."
"Don't try to make this sound more exciting than it really is. Just say you cut your finger on the edge of the can's lid."
Aoi grew tearful as a red drop of blood appeared on the tip of her index finger.
"Oh, I know. Boy, I think you should lick this off to disinfect it."
"Well, I don't think so. Why would I?"
"Don't act like it's some awful thing! You made me do it when we bound our contract, but now you refuse to put mine in your mouth!? Honestly! Oh, honestly!!"
Aoi was quite upset and began licking off her own finger.
Their ridiculous conversations did help pass the time. When adding original toppings, it took time for them to work their way into the entire cup. If you miscalculated, your noodles could end up overcooked.
"Well, even if she only diverts the enemy's attention, I can see how letting Biondetta recover would be useful," said Aoi. "But what about Olivia? Letting that child wake up seems to me like it would only complicate matters. She would likely try to escape from us at every opportunity and I doubt Biondetta would appreciate it after losing to her. We could end up with an internal threat in addition to the external ones."
"That ties into my second reason. If we can get information out of Olivia, we might be able to get some details on the Bridesmaid troops deployed in Houbi Village."
The silver-haired shrine maiden gave a bitter look.
Aoi crossed her arms, which lifted her surprisingly large breasts.
"That seems overly optimistic. Wouldn't that require fully eliminating the Queen worship rooted so deeply in that child's soul? Although I would appreciate it if we could accomplish that."
"I know."
"I am not just talking about whether she will obey us or rebel. If she pretended to turn over a new leaf and fed us false information, it would only invite chaos."
Of course, Kyousuke knew all too well the troublesome transformations people underwent when influenced by the White Queen.
However.
The promised time arrived, so Kyousuke removed the small stone from the top of his lid.

“If we can’t get Olivia on our side, we’ll have to search out the extent of Bridesmaid’s deployment on our own.”
“Mh.”
“We have a set destination in mind, but the route we take to reach that cruise ship at the mountain’s peak depends on Bridesmaid’s location. It would mean a lot to know their timetable in advance.”
“Summoner battles are quite different from those of traditional armies. Isn’t a dense mass of enemies the perfect opportunity to build up a Chain and wipe them all out? Aren’t you at Freedom’s 900 level?”
Meinokawa Aoi fully peeled up the lid, bent over at the hip without bothering to grab any chopsticks, and leaned forward to bring her nose to the steaming container.
“Ahhh. The combination of tomato and cheese seems to have come out well. Didn’t it, my cute chicken *cheze rizo-to*-chan☆”
“You can’t even call that ramen anymore, so it’s actually scary that it looks like it might actually be decent.”
“D-don’t leer at me like some kind of wild animal… But if you are jealous of my amazing creation, I am willing to give you a bite. But just one! O-okay, say ‘ah’.”
“…What am I supposed to do here? I understand the rules of this world, but I’m just having trouble believing it…”
“What, so you want to fight? Then let’s let our fists do the talking.”
Meinokawa Aoi puffed out her soft-looking cheeks, but there was a clear look of enjoyment in her eyes.
She soon began eating the risotto(-ish thing) she had created.
“Eating with someone else really is nice.”
“…”
“Renge has been better than most, but I really have been neglected as the generations go by. There really is no substitute for eating a proper meal like this.”
But anyway.
Kyousuke got back on topic while slurping up the cup noodles he had successfully modified into *ankake* ramen.
“Using their superior numbers against them by breaking through a dense formation with a Chain is certainly a viable tactic, but what if Bridesmaid sees it coming? They might have intentionally spread out their people to prevent a Chain. They might even skip the whole Summoning Ceremony business and just snipe us from a distance. We’re not talking about that pure white here and summoners aren’t all-powerful. I also want to ask Olivia *how well they understand me.* Even if that means angering her into letting something slip.”
Olivia was a member, Azalea had been a member, and they had their connection to the White Queen herself. Bridesmaid knew far too many people who understood Kyousuke as a person rather than a legend. If they understood the details of his thought processes and built up a flowchart

people could use, it would be dangerous to continue blindly on with no hope of supplies or reinforcements. They might lure him into wasting Incense Grenades. He did not have access to anyone like Lu Niang Lan or Ellie Slide here, so he could not resupply and needed to be careful.
Meinokawa Aoi's surprisingly large chest rose and fell as she worked her artificial lungs to blow on and cool down the contents of her container. Then the shrine maiden looked up in just her white *kosode*.
"…I'll just have to trust your judgement then."
"Thanks."
But then she grabbed some of her thick rice porridge creation, held the chopsticks out toward Kyousuke, and winked.
"Listen. Do not forget that this smooth decision is a result of a pure and beautiful maiden taking a step back so the gentleman can show what he can do. Besides, you seem biased toward those girls with Western names like Olivia and Biondetta, so I need to remind you that I am the one with the contract to share your destiny as your vessel."
"Sure, whatever."
"That's the kind of behavior I'm complaining about! Stop acting like I don't matter at all to you!!"

Part 6

Kyousuke had feared using the oil lamp would burn it, but *that was not the world they lived in now*. Still, they took their time drying out the shrine maiden outfit. And surprisingly, Meinokawa Aoi seemed to be the sort of person who would go all in on the task before her eyes, no matter how dull it was. Perhaps it was like finding an abandoned puzzle magazine in a mountain cabin during a blizzard.
"That should do. Fwa ha ha. Look, it's perfectly dry now, isn't it!?"
"Yes, yes. If you have time to strike a pose with your hands on your hips, then get that *hakama* on already…"
They had washed Kyousuke's shoes and Aoi's boots in the lake and then dried them. Kyousuke and Aoi (once she was dressed again) made periodic patrols around the lake, but they never found any Bridesmaid summoners or Repliglass soldiers. Not only was the network of tunnels below Houbi Village quite complex, but it was likely designed with large decoy rooms and treasure storerooms that looked quite suspicious but did not actually have anything in them.
Since the enemy did not immediately attack this kind of "truly important location", it was unlikely that Renge, Higan, or the other villagers had been captured and forced to talk.

“No, wait. *Choosing at random will always work out right now*, so that can’t be it. Maybe the fact that we have a clear objective in mind has started having an effect.”
“Hm?”
Meinokawa Aoi cutely tilted her head like a child despite giving off such alluring charm, but as the two of them killed the abundance of time on their hands, the moment they were waiting for finally arrived.
24 hours had passed.
The losers were freed from their penalty.
“Kh…”
“…Uuh… Onii-chan?”
In the shrine(?), Biondetta and Olivia groaned and started moving below their blankets. Instead of their previous, mechanically-repeated movements, these motions had a clear human will behind them.
However…
“Tch, the enemy!?”
“Stop, Biondetta! The battle is over!!”
“And why are we naked? What in the world happened on the way here, sir? Surely you are not going to claim ignorance to the difference between seeing and being seen.”

“Oh, no. Now she’s aiming her gun at me with a smile. I’ve completely lost track of what that might mean. And you really did a half-assed job, Meinokawa Aoi. This is the first I heard of you putting them to bed in the nude!!”
He had to distance himself from the two girls covered in nothing but a blanket, but if he left Biondetta alone with Olivia, it could easily lead to a fight to the death. That left only one option.

“Aoi, you take care of this. It’s best for you girls to stick together, right!?”
“Ehhh? Do I have to remind you not to treat me like this!?”
Kyousuke escaped the shrine(?) and simultaneously tossed the silver-haired shrine maiden inside while ignoring how he messed up her clothing in the process, but then he heard some odd sounds of destruction from within, something like a broken branch flew out of the door, and a round object about the size of a volleyball came bouncing out.
It was the alluringly slender arm and beautiful head of the Joruri Method girl. And as soon as their eyes met…
“Boo.”
“Wow, is that an old-fashioned joke!”
“…This is not good. My joints might have gotten looser. They seem to be coming apart easier than normal.”
He picked up the arm and head just as Biondetta left the shrine(?) with her clothes back on and her decorative tail swishing back and forth.
“Sir, explain this.”
“Umm, Olivia’s still alive I hope?”
“Should I assume she is no longer our enemy?”
He hesitantly peeked below Biondetta’s arm and inside the shrine(?) where the (headless and somewhat dismembered) shrine maiden stood to protect Olivia who was frozen with fear in the corner.
“Sigh, so I was captured, was I?”
The double blonde braid girl did not seem all that bitter about it. She rubbed the flat chest of her school swimsuit to make sure it was fitting right and she stuck her hand below the white floral pattern pareo to fix the swimsuit that was riding up in her butt. She then breathed a short sigh.
“But, well, if this is the will of the White Queen, then there’s no helping it. There is meaning in all things, so I must have lost for a reason! Right, Onii-chan☆”
“…”
Those words and her smile put a bitter look on Kyousuke’s face.
This was rooted deep.
To Olivia in her straw hat, the White Queen was the same as “good morning” and “good night”. She was the same as the portrait on a paper bill or a coin. Olivia was not being forced to perform a special and holy ceremony; it had completely become a part of her normal life.
(But that’s why this can work.)
Kyousuke thought quietly to himself.
It did not matter who had the advantage. A summoner fought by using everything to their advantage
(This isn’t Kingdom F in Eastern Europe. It’s the distant Houbi Village.)
Now, it all began here.
Kyousuke forced the detached head onto the shrine maiden, passed her the arm, and then ducked below her other arm to put himself on Olivia’s eye level.

“Olivia, I have something to discuss with you.”
“I have to admit, Onii-chan, I didn’t expect for you to avoid a straightforward approach and attack while I was unconscious. But I see. So you prefer to play with people in their sleep. But that’s a problem. That makes you a pervert, but for some reason I don’t mind when it’s you.”
“Via.”
He spoke more strongly and used his old nickname for her.
Her small shoulders jumped, so it seemed to have worked. She was still refusing to look at him, but her imaginary tail was wagging.
(What did I do in these moments back then?)
After thinking back, he gently rubbed her head. Only then did she deign to turn toward him.
The girl sat with her knees up despite her floral pattern pareo. She also pouted her lips and rubbed her big toes together.
“I won’t listen if this is about you and the White Queen fighting. I mean, it’s all your fault for being mean to her! She’s trying to welcome you, so if you would just face her and accept the invitation, no one would have to say goodbye!!”
“…”
Still crouching, Kyousuke tapped his index finger against his temple.
Biondetta quickly gave a suggestion while standing by the shrine(?) door.
“Is it *too late*?”
“No, not yet.”
It was easy to say she would never understand, but you could not start a dialogue with that kind of attitude.
He analyzed Olivia Highland’s unique mental state in his own way.
“Mutter, mutter…Onii-chan won’t listen to me…mutter, mutter…”
“This isn’t like before.”
“Sigh. So is the problem that this school swimsuit isn’t white? I didn’t realize a pervert from an island nation would be so picky. But I need to study up on this ocean-loving nation’s swimsuits for the sake of your future, Onii-chan!”
Biondetta must have decided this was never going to end because she butted in.
“Just tell her the truth already.”
“No!” protested Olivia. “And who is she anyway, Onii-chan!?”
“Are you not going to listen to your teacher!?”
“Eh? Teacher…? Hmm, then I guess I have to…”
She had erased an entire village from the map using around 20,000 rockets, and now this. Were they lucky the rules of a child’s world were making an appearance, or was this only a sign of how deep the distortion went?
Kyousuke looked to the light pink rose decoration on her tiny chest. It took the Queen’s white and added a bit of the red that Kyousuke tended to choose for his clothing.
“You know what?”

She worshiped the White Queen, but she *was not* Kyousuke's enemy. You could say she was an ally to both. Or to put it another way…
(She's like a child trying to protect her own little world by keeping her parents from fighting.)
Kyousuke wrinkled his brow at the headache brought on by that idea.
Even as a joke, it was simply too cruel, but that was the truth as Olivia saw it.
Simply put, Olivia wanted to bring Kyousuke and the White Queen together. So depending on the situation, she would fight for either side. She was currently taking the Queen's side and attacking Kyousuke, but she focused on maintaining a balance and she would take the other side if the scales tipped in that direction. She did not really want to kill him. It was more like *she wanted to correct his mistake.*
But that was all.
She wanted to bring Kyousuke and the White Queen together, so anything else would look like noise to her. The girls like Meinokawa Aoi and Biondetta in particular would look like distractions from the "family" she envisioned, so she would view them like a job or mistresses. That was why she had not hesitated to attack Houbi Village.
Bridesmaid.
That word referred to the pure white bride's attendant. This girl truly embodied that concept.
"Olivia."
"…What is it, Onii-chan?"
Kyousuke spoke to the double braid and straw hat girl who sulkily puffed her cheeks out in the corner. He spoke slowly so she could process it one thing at a time.
"Sorry, but I can't do that."
"Why not?"
She seemed to have understood what he meant.
Olivia's eyes widened like a child who was asked whether she would go with her mother or father.
From her point of view, he had skipped past the important point.
"Why can't you!? No one would reject anyone, there wouldn't be any conflict between anyone, and it wouldn't cause anyone any trouble, so why do you alone push her away!? If you would just bury the hatchet and take just one step toward the Queen, *it would fix all the problems in the world*!!"
"…"
It might look that way if you did not know anything.
It might look like the conflict would end if Kyousuke stopped rejecting the White Queen's intense appeals.
However.
"I can't do that. No matter what."
"That's not a reason!! The White Queen loves you so much, so how could she be doing anything wrong!? It's your fault for not looking her way! That's

why she's sulking!! So why do you actively seek that chaos, Onii-chan!? The White Queen is so admirable, so what don't you like about her!?"
"Because that evil is in love with Shiroyama Kyousuke the Strongest."
"?"
Olivia fell silent because she did not know what he meant.
Her small hands did not touch anything: not her double braids, not her decorative collar, not her thick chain, and not the keyhole of the bag-sized lock. She could not even comfort herself by fidgeting with something in her hands.
Her eyes remained wide as she tilted her head in actual confusion for once, so Kyousuke looked her in the eye and explained.
"That is not who I am. It is a fictional being. She is obsessed with an image of Shiroyama Kyousuke that she created in her own mind, so it wouldn't solve anything for me to approach her now. The discrepancies between the ideal and the reality would be laid bare and it would all fall apart. *She would decide her love had been a crude fake.*"
"That's not-…"
"The person in front of you here can't compare to the Shiroyama Kyousuke the Queen thinks I am, Olivia. In fact, no one can. Since I don't meet the specs of that framework, I can't even control the White Queen through her love. That leaves only one option: killing and stopping her, once and for all."
"That's not true!! I don't understand what you're saying, Onii-chan! There isn't more than one Shiroyama Kyousuke! *Why can't you understand the simple fact that there's only one of you in the world, Onii-chan*!?"
"Yes, there is only one of me. And I only have this one life." Kyousuke readily admitted it. "But the White Queen doesn't understand that. She might look completely obsessed with me, but if I actually die, she'll give up on me in the blink of an eye. She'll decide it had all been an illusion and she'll search out something else that won't be destroyed at the slightest touch. And if that happens, no one will be able to predict what she'll do because they won't know what she's obsessed with. That's why I have to kill her myself while she's focused on me. Anything else would do irreparable damage to the world."
"Onii-chan, what you're saying makes no sense…"
"Probably not. But it's the truth."
"That settles it. I'm going with you, Onii-chan. I mean, you're clearly insane and that will never change if I'm not with you. It's clear now that you won't join the White Queen unless you realize the error of your ways!"
Kyousuke slowly sighed.
That was good enough for now.
He had been afraid they would reach a stalemate, but now he knew Olivia would stay with him instead of wandering off. They did not need a complete mutual understanding right away. It was more important that he set up a situation where they could contact each other at any time.

“Olivia, I’m fairly certain we’re safe since we haven’t been attacked for more than 24 hours now, but just to be sure: you don’t have a bug or homing beacon on you, do you?”
“You’re the one that stripped off all my clothes, aren’t you? You didn’t check then?”
“That is one hell of a false accusation there, but whatever. How about inside your body?”
“Do you want to check every nook and cranny yourself? Here: ahhhh.”
She was acting just like a sulking child. She did not care if he saw her small tongue or the uvula in the back of her throat. Olivia opened her mouth wide and looked up at him, so Kyousuke ran his smartphone along her undeveloped bodylines like a metal detector.
He also looked deep in the defenseless girl’s throat before answering.
“Well, I can tell you aren’t giving off any obvious EM or IR signals. Still…”
“Isn’t that good enough? Hmph.”
If they were using Repliglass, it was possible an aromatic or chemical signal was conveying information like ant or bee pheromones, so this was still not perfect. However…
“But this could be a problem. If I’m caught off guard and die, I’ll never have a chance to make up with the Queen. Never ever.”
“! I don’t have anything! If I did, I’d tell you!!”
This was Olivia Highland’s controller.
Kyousuke decided to trust her here.
Whatever was motivating her, he doubted Olivia would lie. That small girl in a school swimsuit, a decorative collar, a ridiculously short skirt, and a floral pattern pareo would not allow anyone to get in the way of bringing Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen together. Not even if it was a fellow Bridesmaid member. Her belief in the Queen was different from Azalea’s or The Saint’s. It was purer, more transparent, and void of ulterior motives, but that made it much more deeply rooted.
“Then let’s move on to our next destination.”
That was all he said before leaving the shrine(?) which housed emergency supplies. As he left through the double doors, Waitress Biondetta whispered into his ear.
Only someone who had shared his past in the Queen’s Miniature Garden could speak these words.
(You really don’t need to let that *March Hare* incident bother you after all these years, you know?)
Kyousuke responded without looking back.
His voice was deep and cold.
“It’s a simple fact.”

Part 7

Meinokawa Aoi guided them from the large cave and into more complex passageways. These had outdoor lights attached at irregular intervals, but the bedrock was supported by wooden pillars. Perhaps due to the moisture in the air, they seemed somehow swollen. It may have been a way of keeping people away from this holy ground, but…

(This is bad. A lot of this looked hand dug, but this area looks especially dangerous.)

“This area sure has changed,” commented Aoi.

“Really?”

“Given my origins, I used to use the caves as a playground, but I don’t remember it looking so rundown. This is what happens when you look away for a moment. The flow of time is so cruel.”

The silver-haired shrine maiden narrowed her eyes and sounded somewhat sorrowful.

The wooden framework must have reminded her of traditional scaffolding and the modern lights of traditional lamps because Meinokawa Aoi pouted her lips.

“I wonder what will happen with the festival. I never know when I will be able to come to the surface next and it isn’t often that coincides with such a festive opportunity. I had hoped I could go enjoy it with everyone.”

“…”

“Well, I know I’m hardly normal. They were all just little kids, but it won’t take long before they outgrow me both physically and mentally. And who knows how the festival will have changed form by the time I make another appearance. Honestly. Just honestly.”

At that point, Aoi slowly shook her head.

Instead of not creating stress, she immediately rid herself of the stress she did create.

That seemed to be her way of life, so she intentionally changed the subject.

“The Joruri Method is a technological system with a history stretching back five or six hundred years, but as its name suggests, it is something of a hodgepodge of different things.”

Both moisture and dust filled the air, but that had to be a harsh environment for a fully artificial being. She wiped moisture from her brow, which showed off the armpit hidden below her wide sleeve.

“Just as Joruri is a collection of various plays, songs, and dolls, the Joruri Method forming my body has gathered many technologies from both the East and the West. A lot of it came from the South Seas and the Western Continent, so you could maybe even say it is primarily a Western thing.”

“…What’s your point?”

“Prepare to be amazed when you see the St. Elmo at the summit. Golems, Homunculi, the Shakoki-Dogu, the Terracotta Army, images of the Virgin Mary, images of the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara, and even execution

devices like the iron maiden and the wicker man. Oh, you will be all too aware of just how greedy and indiscriminate a people the Japanese are."
"If you say so."
"You! Will! Be! Amaaaaazed!!"
Aoi began childishly thrashing about (which made those surprisingly large things jiggle), but when she saw that exchange, Olivia pouted her lips while clinging to Kyousuke's hips, which she had apparently decided was her designated spot.
"Boo. If you were always like this, you wouldn't have to fight with the White Queen."
Since Aoi was designed to look just like the Queen, this situation might indeed look something like that, but in reality it could not have been more different.
And then…
"!"
Kyousuke and Biondetta simultaneously grabbed Meinokawa Aoi's shoulders as she took the lead once more.
This was a hand-dug tunnel, so it was not as straight as a school hallway. It meandered here and there and they had heard a quiet noise from further ahead.
The silver-haired shrine maiden gave them a puzzled look, so Kyousuke used a gesture that would be understood in most any country in the world: he pressed his index finger against her soft lips.
And on top of that…
"(The footsteps are too regular. They're probably with Bridesmaid. Should we take them out here?)"
"(The bedrock is unstable. The pillars are rotted and half broken, so summoning a Material could easily get us buried alive.)"
"(Yes, and Bridesmaid would probably happily do it on purpose if it was for the Queen.)"
They could not reproduce any detailed nuance while communicating using their eyes and fingers instead of words, but that was the gist of the conversation.
They had to think up some way around this. The tunnel curved a lot, but it was still just the one path and there was no other path to take.
And a moment later…
"Wait!! Is someone there!?"
A booming voice struck Kyousuke in the back.
It came from Olivia Highland who had been clinging to him until now. She let go of his hips and walked on ahead. Thinking she was betraying them, the waitress demon prepared to snap at her, but Kyousuke stopped her with a hand. The situation was already underway. He could only reach for the Incense Grenade in his pocket while carefully watching the girl in a school swimsuit, decorative collar, ridiculously short skirt, and floral print pareo.
"That voice…?"

“You were safe, Miss Highland!?”
(Oh, I get it…)
Kyousuke thought to himself while listening to the voices from the blind spot down the tunnel.
(She had gone missing, but it was possible they still didn’t know Olivia was working with us.)
“There was some trouble with the bombing and everything else, so I got separated. You hadn’t heard?”
“We had. *He* was worried.”
“We can head there right away. We’ll get you some hot food and a blanket.”
“No, I can still walk around, so don’t worry. Don’t take away my faith in the White Queen.” Olivia spoke cheerfully. “More importantly, I saw footprints matching Shiroyama Kyousuke’s on the way here. And the food wrappers hidden around here were a lot like what I saw in the shopping district. Investigate outside. He’s probably been frequently heading up to the surface.”
After hearing the footsteps disappear into the distance, Olivia stuck out her tongue. The others remained hidden until there was no chance they would be heard.
“Well, that should about do it. If I’m going to get Onii-chan and the Queen together, I guess I can’t let Bridesmaid capture you here.” She lightly struck her small chest with her fist and she winked. “See? I’m not your enemy right now, Onii-chan☆”
“Hm,” muttered Kyousuke as he focused on their surroundings.
The group blocking the way forward really did seem to be gone, so she was not bluffing.
Confident in that, he crouched down to her eye level.
“Which will it be, Olivia: a rap on the head or a spanking?”
“Eh!?”
“What else could you expect after running off without asking our opinion first!?” demanded Biondetta. “Sir, this isn’t worth your time. Allow me to turn this insolent little butt bright red.”
“Nyah, nyahhh!?”
Olivia made a surprisingly swift escape, but she ultimately took up her position hiding behind Kyousuke’s back. Her already small body shrank down further and tears filled her eyes.
In fact…
“Biondetta, aren’t you chasing her around a little too much? You’ve scared her enough to count as a punishment, so leave it at that.”
“I see. So it was you spoiling her like this that created her current personality.”
Meanwhile…
“Oh, deary me.”
As an antique, Aoi gave quite an elderly-sounding exclamation as she climbed up an especially tall step in the tunnel. Once past that, the scenery

changed entirely. Before, it had been a tunnel with mining lightbulbs installed at irregular intervals, but now the walls were covered in white crystals. Due to the crystalline structure, they seemed to form giant diagonal pillars and the light reflected off the walls and ceiling made it hard to judge distances or depth.
Was it black-haired Renge who had mentioned these crystals were used for the shrine's protective charms?
"Once through here, we will be near the summit. I mentioned a crater lake that had dried up after the bottom grew cracked, right? A ladder was embedded in the side of large crack, so we can use that as a shortcut."
"I see."
Kyousuke nodded once in the even greater moisture of this cave.
"…But it looks like we're going to run into some trouble first."
The sound was too high-pitched to call footsteps. Perhaps that was because this was a crystal deposit.
A single figure blocked their way forward.
The large man wore a lab coat and a black riding suit, so he looked out of place among the white crystals. His inhaler-equipped helmet resembled a fighter pilot's and a wheeled oxygen tank rolled at his feet. This was the swordsman summoner who had worked with Olivia and caught Biondetta off guard the day before.
Before he could draw the sword which was longer than he was tall, the vengeance demon aimed the muzzle at the end of her silver Blood-Sign. But not at the large man. She aimed it at the back of Olivia's head as she clung to Kyousuke's hips.
"Biondetta."
"No, sir. Olivia Highland is skilled enough to accurately destroy the Silhouette at the core of a Material, so beginning a battle against her at Cost 1 would be suicide. If you can't start with a Cost advantage of at least 5 and preferably more than 10, it would be best to avoid using the Summoning Ceremony."
"It doesn't matter," replied Kyousuke. And he was not just letting emotion cloud his judgment. "If that was all it took to be the strongest, I would have killed the Queen a lot sooner."
"…"
Olivia trembled even more than Biondetta when she heard that.
What was it that had shocked the small girl? That he was denying her talent, or that he had mentioned killing the Queen?
"Olivia, are you going to rejoin him?"
"Onii-chan…"
"Do as you wish. Either way, I'll crush him and continue on."
Kyousuke did not even look back at the girl whose swimsuit had grown a darker shade of blue after reabsorbing so much moisture. For one thing, she was still contracted with that summoner. If that helmeted man threw an Incense Grenade, she could not reject it.

And Olivia could accurately guide an attack toward the Silhouette and ignore the Cost difference.
(But that perfect one-hit-kill technique is reliant on Olivia Highland actually controlling the Material.)
Kyousuke kept his eyes on the enemy before him and pulled his Repliglass Blood-Sign from his back.
(So it's just like trick art or an optical illusion. If I can fool Olivia's sensory organs, she'll still miss and won't be able to pull off that one-hit-kill. Of course, the Material will be changing every few seconds and each time I'll have to rearrange the trick to work with ultrasonic waves, infrared, or whatever other senses it has, but that's fine. *I have it all memorized*.)
"What's the matter, Bridesmaid?"
He put on a daring smile as he made his announcement.
He had no idea who this man was, but if he was reliant on Olivia Highland's talent, it was all over for him.
"Just try it. Assuming you're really so confident that you can defeat me with the same trick twice."
The helmeted swordsman summoner did not move out of the way and he remained silent.
No, it was hard to tell with the mask covering his expression, but he was laughing.
"I knew it…"
Finally, he spoke.
But Shiroyama Kyousuke was the only one who tensed in realization of what that voice meant.
"I knew it, I knew it, I knew it. So a mere princess was not enough to stop you."
"*You*… It can't be…"
Biondetta frowned at how he said the word "you".
There were only a select few people with which he put such emphasis on the word. This had to be someone quite close to him but also a target of his hatred.
Then who was he?
This had to be someone just as – or more – twisted than Biondetta, but what candidates remained?
Olivia gave the answer.
While still clinging to Kyousuke's hips, the double blonde braid girl called her partner's name.
"…Doctor S."
"That's right. And the S stands for Shiroyama, you failed guinea pigs."

Part 8

Once, 15 children had been gathered from around the world and placed in a secret facility deep underground. The children living in the Miniature Garden had all been given new names, but there had been one point in common between those names.

They had all been given the surname of Shiroyama.

But why?

The situation was set in motion before their thoughts could catch up. Doctor S pulled a pineapple-shaped Incense Grenade from his lab coat and Shiroyama Kyousuke's Blood-Sign sliced through the air before he could pull the pin.

The weapon roared like a metal bat and was clearly being used to prevent Doctor S from starting the Summoning Ceremony.

That was hardly surprising.

His attack hit the back of Olivia's neck as she clung defenselessly to his hips. He did not hesitate to strike the bright nape visible below her decorative collar.

"Gah!?"

Even if the summoner and vessel were spiritually linked, there was nothing they could do if one of them was physically knocked unconscious. Olivia crumpled to the cave floor like a broken doll. Doctor S laughed within his helmet and toyed with the useless Incense Grenade in his hand.

"I thought you said she could do as she wished, you failure."

"I take it back, you piece of shit."

Even during that carefree exchange of words, they were already clashing. Kyousuke and Doctor S left everyone else behind and swung their Blood-Signs as purely physical weapons. Kyousuke knew the swordsman summoner would knock his Blood-Sign from the air with his sword, but he incorporated that into his plan and transformed the ricochet into an unexpected lucky hit. His Blood-Sign shot up irregularly and veered sharply toward the man's face.

"Whoops."

With the sound of something solid breaking, the lab coat man's head jerked backwards.

The single blow had shattered his military grade helmet like an eggshell, but the man known as Doctor S did not seem to mind. He moved back and used almost elegant movements to pull a clear medical device from his lab coat, press the inhaler mask to his mouth, and tighten the tubes running through his riding suit like a fighter pilot's suit.

That artificially reproduced a hyperbaric oxygen environment to manipulate his own thought speed.

He was a man leaving middle age and approaching elderly.

But even with his gray hair revealed, he did not look at all physically inferior. His body was covered in the muscles of an athlete who constantly trained with machines.
And it was a mistake to breathe a sigh of relief just because he stepped back.
Despite that action, Doctor S was still close enough for his long sword to behead or bisect Kyousuke. Just like with Biondetta, he had created an imaginary hurdle to cover himself with the apparent shadow of defeat.
“Tch!!”
After a short delay, Kyousuke raised his Blood-Sign vertically to defend. A moment later, orange sparks and an impact burst out before the sound of slicing air was heard. Unable to fully stop that weight, Kyousuke was knocked off balance.
“Sir!!”
Biondetta joined the fight with her waitress-style miniskirt fluttering around her.
She had no idea which way Doctor S himself would move, so she instead fired a sniper rifle bullet at the wheeled oxygen tank at his feet. The metal can was defenseless because it took a moment for his movements to propagate down and move it, so her bullet opened a hole in its center. But…
“Biondetta, not yet!!”
“!? Really!? It’s still not over!?”
Had anyone said it was over once the oxygen tank was taken out?
Just as the tank exploded, Doctor S moved forward. Kyousuke was forced to defend and his movements were further sealed by the need to cover for Biondetta.
“Let’s see.”
Meinokawa Aoi sounded far too carefree as she cut between the two of them.
Doctor S now had his inhaler connected to an oxygen tank the size of a hairspray can and he naturally drew his sword and made a horizontal slash toward the defenseless shrine maiden’s slender neck, but…
“Removing my head will not kill me.”
She did it herself.
It was like removing a hat with her dominant hand. Meinokawa Aoi winked and removed her head just in time for the tip of the silver line to pass through the empty air between. And it was not over yet. With her needlessly large breasts pushing out on her shrine maiden outfit, (headless) Aoi had removed the expected resistance from the sword’s path, so it continued on and forcefully struck the wall of the crystal cave. It seemed not even Doctor S could fight the pain that sent shooting up from his wrist.
“Oh? That’s a neat trick!” he said.
“Surely you know why samurai and ninja mansions were built with such narrow hallways. Besides, the katana is a part of our culture, so I would rather *a mere fan* not act like an expert.”

Before the brief pain and tingling passed, Kyousuke and Biondetta were on the move again. The two summoners rushed past headless Meinokawa Aoi on either side and Doctor S finally managed to move back to put more distance between them.
The flow of time changed from fast to slow.
But it was a tense slow, like a taut bowstring that could be released at any moment.
The inhaler-equipped full-face helmet of a fighter pilot had been broken and Kyousuke roared at the exposed face of the gray-haired man.
“What the hell are you doing here, *dad*!?”
“Yes, yes! I am still searching for the ‘answer’ that kept you from calling me *scum*!!”
Some questions about Shiroyama Kyousuke’s past had remained.
He had seemed familiar with the Summoning Ceremony even before arriving in the Miniature Garden. He had set an objective for himself and fulfilled it like a precision guided missile, but who had made him that way?
In fact…
Just like young Biondetta had arrived at the Miniature Garden after experiencing something that not even “horrific” suitably described, *where* had Kyousuke come from to arrive in the Miniature Garden?
All of the answers were found here.
Doctor S switched to a clear medical inhaler before speaking.
“My greatest desire was fulfilled in July of 1999. I saw the future then. I discovered the Third Summoning Ceremony, contacted the beings that surpass even the gods, and saw that purest of white lights. And there I saw nothing but despair.”
If he drew the blade, he would make a slash. If he sheathed it, he would deliver a blunt blow.
Even with the Summoning Ceremony taken from him…no, *because* it was taken from him, Doctor S shined all the more.
As if to say he had always been strongest on his own.
“But the stagnation afterwards was truly awful. You understand, don’t you? I *created you, remade you, and released you into the world* as a guiderail for the Queen! But you failed!! Humanity! Has! Made! No! Progress!! Ever since, I’ve had my hands full simply making course corrections! Yes, even now!!”
“From the beginning…?”
Based on how long they had lived, Meinokawa Aoi was much older than Doctor S. Since she had been created as an exact lookalike, she would have made at least partial contact earlier than him.
But the silver-haired shrine maiden still used that wording.
She reattached her head and brushed her long hair off her shoulders.
“He was involved in it all *from the very beginning*? From the moment the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony was created!?”
“Hurry it up.”

The man who carried a different legend from Kyousuke's spoke in a voice shaking from either irritation or joy.
Regardless, he urged Kyousuke to hurry.
"Hurry up and bring the Queen under control. Then this world will be completed. Humanity will be able to stand at the true peak. *You guide while I experience.* You don't mind if I give you a push forward and move the hands of the world's clock ahead a bit if it helps us fulfill our respective roles, do you?"
"You thrill-obsessed freak…"
"Precisely! It is because I feel more fear than anyone that I desire more than anyone, ensure my safety more than anyone, and want to experience it all from closer than anyone!! Yes, yes!! This tingling in my spine is everything!! But why bother mentioning how I live my life at this point?"
Either way, it did not matter what Kyousuke thought.
This man had not wanted to be destroyed by the pure white, so he had given that role to someone else. He had merely used his own child as the bumper of his car so he could remain in the driver's seat and feel none of the pain himself. That was why he had "created" Kyousuke.
Yes, he did not even feel the attachment one might for a stuffed animal. It was all purely mechanical.
If they saw the number of things forced onto Kyousuke until he had given up on living a life in the light of the sun, anyone would have known it was far too much for a single person to bear.
This was not for someone else or for an Alice.
Just how rare was it for that boy to shout in anger for himself?
That unspeakable cruelty had already gone much too far.
"You said you would give me a push forward, didn't you?"
"Yes."
"Did you never consider the possibility that I would kill *you* before that?"
"Of course not." Doctor S's shoulders would not stop shaking with laughter.
"Surely you didn't think my experiment could be stopped simply by taking Olivia Highland from me. Surely you didn't think the nightmare of Doctor S would stop at that."
He snapped his fingers.
Immediately, an invisible but definite change occurred. Only those involved in the Summoning Ceremony would understand what had happened.
(He ended his contract with Olivia!?)
"…"
"You can throw an Incense Grenade if you feel the need," said Doctor S.
"Yes, you, the failure over there! You are Biondetta from the Miniature Garden, aren't you!? You were such a failure your file wasn't even worth tagging, so you two feel free to work together and attack me with two Materials at once. Either way, there is no chance of me being defeated here."
"…It's impossible?"

Biondetta gulped.
That demon of vengeance scorched even the air around her with all forms of madness and barbarity, but she was just about overwhelmed by the great pressure of Doctor S.
“No matter how skilled you might be, that advantage only gives you the upper hand until we summon the Materials,” she warned. “Once we summon those otherworldly beings, a flesh-and-blood human will be crushed with no way to fight back. And that is true even of the Cost 1 Original Series.”
“True enough. If we are following those stagnant rules, anyway.”
He admitted it, yet his confidence remained.
He was hiding something. And this trump card was so great that it would overturn everything the instant he revealed it.
(Don’t tell me…)
Only one thing came to mind.
That was the great evil that Kyousuke least wanted to remember, but it was still the very first thing that occurred to him.
“Don’t tell me! *You…*!!”
As if to reject the answer he had accepted, Kyousuke pulled the pin from a metal can and threw it.
But it did not detonate.
It did not even fall to the crystal ground.
“It may only be five seconds, but that is still five seconds.”
The next thing he knew, another hand was reaching out from the space next to Doctor S. There had been nowhere for a third party to hide in this open tunnel, but it readily appeared from behind him like a piece of trick art.
It was a slender hand wearing a long white glove.
This was not Meinokawa Aoi.
This was not the lookalike…!?

“The flow of time is not a set thing. For example, if you approach impossibly close to the speed of light, a mere instant will stretch out almost infinitely long. In other words, five seconds in this hand is the same as an eternity, *brother*.”
A sensation much like goose bumps raced across Kyousuke’s entire body.
He recognized this.
No one wanted to, but Kyousuke recognized this sensation.

Something was appearing.
Something stepped out from behind Doctor S's back as if flipping over a card.
At this point, there was no denying it.
"Hello, brother. It's finally me☆"
More than terror or rage, it was overpowering nausea that initially exploded in the center of his body.
"U…rp!!!???"
He doubled over, just barely forced down the burning sensation in his throat, and began to step back.
But the sense of danger did not vanish.
The White Queen had appeared.
And yet he could not see the end of it. This was the worst possible situation he could think of, but was it going to get even worse!?
Step.
Step, step.
Those leisurely footsteps did not come from the Queen before his eyes. They echoed off the crystal cave's walls and ceiling as they surrounded the boy and the pure white. But who were they? The greatest evil had already made an appearance, so what was this rotten world waiting around to reveal to him?
"Brother, you already understand, don't you?" The White Queen giggled and casually crushed the Incense Grenade trapped in her eternal prison. "*What could possibly overpower the pressure I produce as an individual?* Surely you already know the answer."
He did not.
He could not find the answer.
After all, he couldn't think of any being that could surpass the White Queen. If anything could overpower that one-of-a-kind and frustratingly absolute white evil, she never would have been such a problem. It was the lack of such a being that had led him to create one, so how could one be walking around now?
After thinking that far, Kyousuke froze in place.
One-of-a-kind.
That meant there could not be two White Queens.
But was that really true?
"Now, then. It's time to announce today's horror theme."
The White Queen gave a carefree smile.
Kyousuke used his trembling throat to speak in something like a groan.
"It…can't be…"
"It can't be what, brother?"
"You've…*multiplied*…?"
"Non, non."

Kyousuke could feel the relief inside his chest when she readily denied that possibility. It was as humiliating as receiving pet food from a kidnapper, but he could not deny the truth. He had to accept it.
But then she said more.
*Step, step, step,

As they fight in secret and die in secret, tracing their footsteps is incredibly difficult, but if you check in the deepest depths of Kingdom F's giant royal library, legend has it you might just run across a text filled with specially compiled records.
The only thing known for sure is that Kingdom F has survived to this day. That is proof enough that there have been people protecting its continued existence.

Incidentally, there is a small fragment of a record that has survived:
Sinceria Highland.
Government Award 913, Noble Bride.
However, her Awards have been reset a few times in the past, so that number does not accurately represent her skill. Even as the monarch herself, she is an extremely skilled vessel who follows an absolute merit system in which she selects the most skilled man among the royal knights as her summoner.

Facts

- The Third Summoning Ceremony is a contract between a human and a Material, so the better someone demonstrates the definition of "human", the better they are perceived by the Material and the better the two synchronize.
- The vessel's mind is contained in the Silhouette at the core of the Material and destroying that allows an instant kill even with a Cost difference of 5-10. But only a vessel at Olivia's extraordinary level can pull it off outside of a lucky hit.
- The Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony is still a ceremony, so a failure hits the magic user with damage that can be called a reaction or side effect. Meinokawa Aoi used this to hold back Olivia.
- Meinokawa Aoi is attempting to procure an artificial vessel using the facility in a cruise ship near the top of the mountain.
- Olivia sees the conflict between Kyousuke and the White Queen as a couple's argument, so she intends to become the enemy or ally of either in order to bring them back together.
- When a vessel becomes a Material, they receive information on the outside world through the specific Material's sensory organs.

- Doctor S is Shiroyama Kyousuke’s biological father and he used his own child as a guiderail for the White Queen. After the Queen’s Miniature Garden, he decided that plan had ended in failure.
- Doctor S was one of the researchers who constructed the Blood-Sign method in 1999 and he was planning to usurp the White Queen’s position from the beginning.
- The Queen is infecting people this time.
- Currently, there are 14,902 White Queens inside Houbi Village. And that number continues to grow.

Notes and References

1. ↑ Iai is a technique of quickly and smoothly drawing out the sword..
2. ↑ Hakama is a traditional Japanese clothing. It covers from waist to ankles.
3. ↑ Kososde is a multipurpose Japanese robe.

Stage 03: Doctor S Awaits the Hunter in the Shadows of a Legend

“Why am I still alive?”
“Oh? You make it sound like you overcame death all on your own.”

(Stage 03 Open 07/20 19:30 Open)
Doctor S Awaits the Hunter in the Shadows of a Legend

Part 1

“Ahhhh

She was letting him escape.
She was clearly just having fun.
“Nowww, then. Brooootherrrr, what will you do?”
“Will you continue with your plan to destroy me, the White Queen you hate so much? Ee hee hee!”
“But, but. I can *infect* people this time. Nowww, who am I using as a host for this one? A member of Bridesmaid? Or a villager from Houbi Village? Oh? But can you just kill them? Well, can you, bunny???”
“Ugwah!!
Aghaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh

“Good, good. Do not worry. If you try to take care of it all at once, you will simply be overwhelmed. Let’s take our time and solve it bit by bit. Understand?”
Biondetta had pursued Kyousuke along with Aoi and she shook her head over and over with a hand on the side of her head as if to shake away a nightmare.
“Urp. An atmosphere of death filled with multiple Queens and heavy bedrock overhead. Really reminds you of the Queen’s Miniature Garden, doesn’t it, sir?”
“Oh, right… I just had to remember that… This isn’t the first time the Queen has multiplied… This was a known phenomenon…not something entirely incomprehensible… I’m fine…I’m still fine…”
“However.” Biondetta added more while lightly kissing the white snake that slithered out of her cleavage. “*Multiple Queens working together* is definitely unprecedented. We should assume this is even more dangerous than the Queen’s Miniature Garden.”
That meant this was the worst situation in history. That was enough to make him feel faint and he had to focus his mind to avoid blacking out in Meinokawa Aoi’s chest.
This absurd situation was not some grand final objective; it was something done just for fun.
She was truly the greatest cheater.
But that was no reason to abandon all thought. They had a veritable mountain of problems to deal with, but that was exactly why their only option was solving them each one at a time.
Kyousuke finally stopped leaning on Aoi and managed to support his own weight.
“Whatever we do, we have no time,” he groaned. “The White Queen will start searching for us – just for fun – before long.”
“First of all, I want to make sure you know that – unlike me – she is not simply borrowing those forms,” said Aoi. “If true White Queens are being mass-produced, then fighting her head-on would be reckless indeed. In fact, we could not defeat even one of them.”
“Since they’re working together, I suppose we can’t lure them into destroying each other this time.”
An unnatural gagging motion entered Kyousuke’s throat once more.
He knew this was different, but he could not help but think of Mary Ann destroying the other Queens. He also thought of the White Queen versus the Black Maw. But they could not use that method here.
“If we can’t fight her head-on or use any tricks, only one option remains.”
Aoi sighed somewhat sadly, perhaps because she no longer had anything to hold to her chest.
“I assume you mean the Material you are hoping can defeat the Queen. That does seem to be our only hope.”

“But we’re up against multiple Queens!” protested Biondetta. “You could easily call it an army!!”
“Yes, but each of the Queens has the same specs. So the rest depends on the situation. It would be difficult to singlehandedly defeat 100 people in a simultaneous game of rock-paper-scissors, but things change if you play them all sequentially in 100 different games. Both options are far from easy, but the first step is preparing the proper conditions and environment.”
Kyousuke breathed in and out.
The despair was too great for that to stop his cold sweat, but he forced his mind into motion.
“In that case, I’m curious about the fact that she’s infecting people instead of simply multiplying or copying herself. That Queen doesn’t care about anyone but me, so it seems odd that she would make herself need the bodies of other people.”
“…To act as hostages?”
“That means it’s possible *she’s afraid* that we could have a chance if she didn’t have that means of stopping us.”
Kyousuke spoke coldly.
He did not hesitate to use the word “afraid” when it came to that Queen.
“Also, we still don’t know how she’s infecting people. Depending on the answer, it might be possible to heal them.”
Biondetta was not the only one shocked by that suggestion.
Even Meinokawa Aoi’s eyes widened.
“W-wait. Are you saying you still haven’t given up?”
“That’s right.”
“You can look at this situation and still set your objective to *saving* them!?”
“Is that anything for a shrine god to say? Can’t you see them wandering in search of help? If I did anything else, the name Alice (with) Rabbit would lose all meaning. That’s the only reason the Queen would bother making more of herself when she’s already the strongest on her own.”
Yes, the White queen already reigned at the highest peak, so it was hard to think she would be trying to strengthen herself. Whether as an individual or a group, the strongest was the strongest. It was an inexact way of thinking, but when she was an infinite being from the beginning, there was no reason to gather a group of her. Then why the infection? The Queen always placed Kyousuke at the center of her world, so the answer was self-evident.
The Queen wanted to make Kyousuke hers by breaking his spirit and removing his attachment to all other things.
She longed for the moment when he took the easy route and relied on the strongest.
She was trying to create a dependency in which he could not survive without that strongest and he could find nothing else to hold pride in. Just as a soccer player would most hate having soccer taken from them and just like a student admitted to a prestigious university would fight desperately to not have their academic records taken from them.

In other words…
“She’s trying to get me to kill them myself. That is the Queen’s goal.”
Needless to say, accepting a game suggested by the White Queen was the height of folly, but he was free to save them in a way that surpassed the Queen’s expectations. He had to outdo her and present the answer without ever giving up. That was the proper course of action for Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He had to end his confusion. He had to regain his will of steel.
And after that, he had one important task to perform.
“Let’s observe the White Queen.”
“Are you serious, dammit!? I was hoping to suggest we hurry to the center, reach the cruise ship at the summit as soon as possible, create the vessel which can contain your trump card Unexplored-class, construct the Material itself, and immediately begin the battle to destroy the White Queen!!”
“There are too many questions concerning this infection. Accepting it as *just something the Queen can do* is the same as refusing to think. …If we can figure out how it works, we can make a further judgment about whether or not they can be returned to normal…no, about whether or not they can be saved.”
“…”
“Now, a question: do you want this to leave a bad taste in your mouth or not?”
“Okay!! Fine!!”

Part 2

Let us discuss Toy Dream 35.
That city had nothing as shady as a combination of a used tools shop and garbage collectors.
Even if you possessed something worth absolutely nothing, anyone with any at all love for antiques would never think of making a little bit of money by giving it to someone who would melt it down and reuse it. If you did see a combination like that, it was best to consider another possibility:
…Could this shop be buying up anything, stolen or not, and melting down the valuable metals in anything that seemed sketchy to make it untraceable before selling it again?
“Boss, here’s the report on today’s job.”
“Oh? Did we have a job too questionable to discuss over the internet?”
The sun had set, but the heat island made sure the night was still blazing hot. That awful night contained so much heat and humidity that it made one wonder if a corpse sitting outside would begin decomposing faster now than at midday.

A middle-aged man had shown up at a needlessly gaudy shop in C Block's Chinatown and the modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan tilted her head at him from behind the counter. She accepted a wide variety of jobs, so she did not remember the details of all of them. (That also proved just how stable her foundation was.)

Before answering, the stubbly man in cheap work clothes enjoyed a sip of the chilled oolong tea the beauty served him.

“I mean that container. That had top priority, right?”
“Oh, Kyousuke-chan’s job.”
“We dealt with the organic portion by mixing in oil filled with aerobic bacteria to create humus for growing forced vegetables. It will soon be used in the home garden of some wealthy young housewife with too much time on her hands. The container itself was broken down into pellets and thrown into a blast furnace so it can be used for the metal beams in a luxury apartment.”
“Hmm. Everyone’s always talking about a recession, but money and free time still gather in the places doing well.”
“Tell me about it. Well, our job is a lot easier when there are plenty of people with no sense of danger whatsoever.”
“Why is it that gathering money doesn’t seem to lead to happiness?”
“Boss, it takes someone who moves around as much cash as you to say something like that. *Yes, someone who moves it around instead of just gathering it.* Happiness isn’t something you work your ass off in search of; you need to set up camp in front of the prime spots where it’ll roll right into your lap. Even this shop was blown to smithereens, but how many days did it take to rebuild it again?”
“Oh, come now. I have a sweaty man telling me how jealous he is of me, so I still have a ways to go. Didn’t you know? The truly happy don’t have to do anything to be loved by everyone. And with those people, they don’t even notice that anything they don’t like is automatically eliminated from their everyday surroundings.”
“So like the really cute girl in your class? People tend to say everyone’s born with a set amount of luck, but they don’t often talk about whether or not you can shove your luck deficit onto someone else. …Oh, right. I did take a sample of the regenerated product and I’ll run an analysis on it, but I doubt we’ll find out what it was originally. So the same as always, I guess.”
“So you’ll take care of it?’
“Exactly. The work tools for our *housework service* are always discarded after use, so those will be disposed of too. It’s kind of incredible. I miss the days when a disposer would create meat dumplings and send them to a mountain pig farm or ocean fish farm as ‘animal food’.”
“You see that a lot in movies, but it isn’t actually all that reliable since undigested human hair will end up in their droppings.”
“Well, if you do as sloppy a job as they show in the movies. They won’t shut up about making the recent Toy Dream movies as realistic as possible, but they can’t exactly give people lessons on how to actually get away with murder. So what was that container anyway? A corpse?”
“This is Alice (with) Rabbit we’re talking about, so I seriously doubt that.”
“Oh, well that’s no fun. I thought we were quietly disposing of a little ‘accident’ so he could maintain his legend.”
“My. Are you the type who feels more excited than disappointed when an idol’s infidelity comes to light?”

“Don’t act like you’re any different, boss. I know you find other people’s misfortune to have the sweetest flavor of all. You wouldn’t fit in with Illegal otherwise.”
The two of them laughed together without taking any of it too seriously. Finding out they had unwittingly disposed of a corpse or two was not about to surprise them and the same went for *something even more dangerous and delicate than a corpse.* No matter what was placed on the line ahead of them, they would break right through the law of conservation of mass because the more they erased from the world, the greater the reward in their pockets. They did not need to beat around the bush on this issue, which just went to show they were both entirely immersed in Illegal.
“Okay, boss, I’ll be going. Our business doesn’t really get going until midnight, so I’ve still got 3 jobs to deal with before dawn. The tea was good. You should probably just remake this place into a teahouse. Maybe a book cafe with shelves full of used books.”
“You forgot the ‘for an amateur’ disclaimer. I can’t hope to match a pro. … And it seems you’re doing good business. Are you avoiding the sun even in prime summer break season?”
“Don’t be ridiculous. That’s the reason why. I know you know more incidents happen this time of year than any other. Everyone decides to cut loose for summer break, but they get irritated in the hot sun and get completely carried away. Summer is the season of love and corpses. Bye☆”

Part 3

Discovery meant instant death.
And it was not just her physical strength that made the White Queen the strongest. She was a cut above in every single field. And that of course included her sensory organs and thought ability. Setting up a situation in which they could see her but she failed to notice them was nigh impossible. In fact, it was much, much more likely that *the opposite* would happen.
In that case, Kyousuke’s group’s options were extremely limited.
The only effective method they could think of was using the White Queen’s traits against her:

- 1. The White Queen is only interested in Shiroyama Kyousuke.
- 2. The White Queen can only infect humans.

In that case…
“Hiss…”
A sound like a broken flute echoed quietly across the surface of the underground lake.
It came from the white snake vessel contracted with Biondetta.

He(?) was not human and he was not Shiroyama Kyousuke. Thus, the Queen*s* would not lock onto him any more than one of the cave's bats or rats when he was acting alone. He was no different from a weed on the side of the road.
Aoi put her hands on her hips and took a deep breath that caused her shoulders and breasts to rise and fall.
"Hmm. In that case, would I have worked too since I'm artificial?"
"There's no guarantee with you since your structure is too close to human."
Kyousuke's group discussed it while traveling through the underground area and approaching the cruise ship near the summit. They had used the aforementioned ladder in the giant crack as a shortcut to escape the enemy surrounding them. The level of danger was little different no matter where they were, but they wanted to stay as close to their trump card as possible.
It was currently around 10:30 PM.
After more than three hours, the white snake returned after gathering as much information as he(?) could. Only Biondetta could communicate with him due to her contract, so she was in charge of that.
Biondetta and Olivia had spent 24 hours in the loser state, so ingesting nutrients was an important job for them. They had borrowed some biscuits from the emergency food in the shrine(?) by the underground lake, so they split them and ate a quick meal.
"Still…"
Kyousuke looked around once more.
They were inside an unlit ship.
The cruise ship had only been made to slowly cruise along the crater lake which had had no exit, so it was not made to sail at sea. It was modeled after a sailing ship, but it probably only used an electric motor to turn a propeller. It did not have any cabins for spending the night. Only the deck giving a view of the scenery and the dining hall for a light meal had been open to the public. It would have been full with only 30 passengers.
They were inside what had been the kitchen next to the dining hall.
Glass test tubes and flasks were packed in tight along with the cooking tools. A lot of mysterious emblems were carved on the walls and floor. As was readily apparent with a vacuum coffee maker or a pressure cooker, kitchen equipment and lab equipment fit together quite well.
"This should be enough to at least reach the Jewel Blood," concluded Aoi.
It could be done dry or wet and hot or cold, but the narrow glass tubes resembled a roller coaster.
"To be blunt, preparing a full Joruri Method in such a short time would not be possible. The White Queen has almost certainly begun her search already," said humanity's oldest artificial vessel. She began negatively, but then she puffed out her large chest. "So use my body. We can't prepare it all from scratch, but we can modify what we already have. Just add what you need to my body to remake me into a vessel that can contain the irregular Material you're thinking of."

Adding to that artificial being may have been a lot like intentionally implanting a pacemaker in someone to control their heartrate even though they were not seriously ill.
“…You’re willing to do that?”
“I do not mind. I am a shrine god, so protecting people is my job. Why wouldn’t I use every method available to me at the time?”
“I’m asking you as Meinokawa Aoi not as the Queen’s lookalike.”
“…”
The silver-haired girl fell silent for a moment.
A smile appeared on her lips.
“…Don’t underestimate me. I had always wanted to escape my role as the White Queen’s lookalike. I’m not about to complain about gaining some originality, especially when it gives me the power to finish off the Queen.”
Meinokawa Aoi slowly placed a hand on the center of her chest.
And she gave a faint smile.
“Humans are always afraid that the changes to their bodies will mean they are ‘aging’ rather than ‘growing’. But never changing at all is also frightening.”
“…”
Kyousuke was not a Joruri Method, so he probably could not understand that mindset. But if that girl with eternal life wanted to change, he had no reason to press the matter further.
“Mhh.”
And then another voice shattered that solemn mood.
It was Olivia Highland who had come to earlier.
The small girl used both hands to rub the back of her head. That caused her slender bodylines to show through her school swimsuit, which had grown a darker shade of blue after absorbing so much moisture, and even revealed the curves of her ribs which looked as delicate as glass, but she showed no sign at all of caring.
She pushed out her tiny chest and the light pink rose decoration adorning it, she shook the thick chain worn diagonally across her body and the bag-sized lock hanging from it, and she asked a sulking question.
“My head is still throbbing. This is more than just sleeping on it wrong. Onii-chan, you hit me, didn’t you?”
“I guess there’s no hiding it then. …Oh, right. Your memories come back while you’re looking at me even though your contract was ended.”
“I can’t believe you!! If you want to indulge in me, then just say so! I won’t stop you! If you feel the need to knock people out just because you can’t work up the nerve unless they’re asleep, then I’m really worried about your future, Onii-chan!!”
“And *I* can’t believe *you*. That leap of logic was downright acrobatic…”
“I-I’ll help you recover, Onii-chan. Work me with me to become normal, okay?”
“I wasn’t asking you to stare up at me and expand on the topic.”

Meanwhile, Biondetta seemed to have finished communicating with the white snake.
“Outta the way! This sounds like a job for his big sis. They’ve always said big boobs are the best way of curing abnormal proclivities.”
“Oh, no. Now she’s added a bizarre conclusion on top of the bizarre premise!!”
“Hold it,” said Aoi. “Are you saying my size is not enough, you symbol of gluttony?”
“And now it’s spread to all of them? Where do I even start with this!?”
“False accusations are like a long chain in a falling block puzzle game. But anyway, I have something to report.”
Biondetta translated what the white snake had seen into human language. And her conclusion was as follows:
“Vessels?” Kyousuke repeated the most important word. “The infection has only spread to human vessels?”
“So it seems. The action that triggers it seems to be a bite, but at its core, it’s still a summoning. The Queen descends into the vessel’s body. It only looks like a massive, spreading infection because she’s summoned into so many of them at once. That seems to be the truth of what’s happening here.”
“So there were simply that many vessels in Houbi Village? It makes sense for Bridesmaid, but I thought the Meinokawas had developed the Joruri Method to make up for their lack of vessels.”
“Not necessarily.” Aoi shrugged, causing the chest of her shrine maiden outfit to jiggle rather dangerously. “Why do you think the Meinokawa family understood the bodily structure of a vessel better than anyone else? Why were they blessed with the opportunity to investigate them until they could artificially reproduce one? Because they had enough samples who were willing to help with their research.”
“You mean…?”
“The Meinokawa family was originally a bloodline which tended to produce vessels. But if they had turned themselves into a vessel family, they would have been at the mercy of outsider summoners. That became what you call a *kom-pleks* for them. That is the reason why they wanted to be summoners instead of vessels.”
…Kyousuke recalled that Meinokawa Higan was an excellent vessel even after having her ability artificially worn down. It was rare for someone of that talent to be born to a normal family, so it was safe to accept that the Meinokawa family held that kind of secret.
Just because someone relied on a computer did not necessarily mean they were bad at mental arithmetic.
Just because someone relied on a microwave did not necessarily mean they could not cook.
“So between the Meinokawas and Bridesmaid, Houbi Village contains far more vessels than would normally be possible.”

“But normally just one Queen can appear in just one vessel, so they must have a way of breaking that limitation and summoning her into multiple vessels at once,” said Biondetta. “That would be the key to this.”
“So simply put, there is a core Queen who is being used to bend the normal rules?”
“I suppose she would be something like the queen bee. No, maybe more like the one real kid’s meal toy placed in a house of mirrors.”
Meinokawa Aoi’s eyes widened at that.
“So if we got rid of that one doll…?”
“…All of the Queen’s would disappear and the vessels would return to normal?”
They all exchanged a glance.
The only one looking displeased was Olivia Highland who wanted Kyousuke and the Queen to get along.
She puffed out her cheeks while her slender fingers toyed with the brim of her large straw hat.
“Why do you just assume you have to fight her? Mhhh…”
“Because it’s necessary.”
“You just have to hurry up and apologize, Onii-chan. If you try to act like you’re in charge and challenge her, it’s obvious she’ll just beat you up and make you behave.”
“Via.”
Not even using her nickname was enough to control her now. She only stuck out her tongue. With her undeveloped bodylines showing through her school swimsuit, which had grown an oddly dark shade from all the moisture, that double blonde braid girl truly seemed to believe Kyousuke could make up with the Queen if he made the first move. And that may have been why she did not sense the danger they were in.
She did not view the White Queen as someone who brought death, even though that was the most basic thing about her. She *Simply believed in that* just like those who believed that an army was there to protect their nation or that police officers carried guns to protect the peace.
That could always be written off as “childish”, but that purity was far too dangerous here.
“We have to figure out which Queen is the core. And whether or not we can just kill that one.”
“Yes, even if the other *infected Queens* are like reflections in a house of mirrors, there has to be some trick in place for the original one’s permanent summoning. Simply put, that one uses a different system. We might be able to find a way to tell them apart if we look into that.”
“Hey, if we’ve identified the enemy we need to defeat, isn’t it about time you got to modifying my body?”
All at once, the situation had started to move.
They were still at a serious disadvantage, but it meant a lot to have an actual goal in mind.

The enemy was quickly leaving the category of “incomprehensible”.
“…White Queen, it’s true you’re still the strongest *for now*.”
Kyousuke spoke quietly inside the cold kitchen lined with strange lab equipment.
The blue flame in his eyes was cold, but there was great heat hidden in his voice.
“But that’s only at the peak of the known route up the mountain. It’s time I showed you what humans are capable of.”

Part 4

Meanwhile, Doctor S was facing his own crisis.
He had ended the search in the caves and moved outside for the time being. Houbi Village had been reduced to ruins by the extraordinary rocket fire, so even the most intact buildings only had their foundations or walls remaining and created twisted silhouettes visible in the dark night. The objects jutting up and tangled together in places were likely the remnants of the wooden festival towers and electric lanterns. No artificial lights illuminated the night and only some red and green particles flowed irregularly around. Those were embers from the attack and fireflies. Doctor S and the rest of the Bridesmaid summoners and Repliglass soldiers had constructed a base on land to join the missile ships and landing ships out at sea. Tents made of synthetic cloth were spread out across the remains of the original village.
“…”
Doctor S sat atop a broken drum and looked around.
Tents came in a wide variety of types, but modifying those used for circuses allowed one to set up a facility the size of a harbor warehouse in a short period of time. When viewed by satellite, the village would have been transformed like painting a new image on a canvas.
But not everything was about logic and efficiency.
In fact, their timetable was in complete shambles.
“Ohh, ohh. Her Majesty…Her Majesty is here…!!”
“Please forgive me for so insolently sharing the same space as Your Holiness!!”
“She really exists! Yes, it wasn’t just a legend! Her Majesty really does exist!!”
Some kneeled on the spot, some were carried to a far-distant land on a wave of ecstasy, and some fainted and convulsed on the ground. Bridesmaid celebrated their greatest moment as a Queen-worshiping cult.
There was a simple reason for that.
Pure white appeared in the dark shadows like a field of lilies in the moonlight.

And there were uncountably many of them.
In all 360 degrees, no matter where you turned, you would only see more and more White Queens. As her very first researcher, Doctor S understood her nature. The White Queen would show no interest in anything other than Shiroyama Kyousuke. In a way, *he had set it up that way*, so of course he did.
Because Kyousuke had failed, this roller coaster no longer had a safe guiderail.
Facing just one wild Queen was a disaster in and of itself, so being surrounded by her in every direction was best viewed as being trapped by a crueler fate than being in the path of a giant meteor being pulled down by the tendrils of gravity.
In that case…
"…Umm, I would like to ask a question."
"Yes, what is it?"
One of the Queens answered him while politely bringing her hands together in front of her and cutely tilting her head. But she was not about to give him such a sweet look just because he was Shiroyama Kyousuke's father. And being part of Bridesmaid, which served her, was not a guarantee of anything. The Queen's interest was only in him himself; no other factor would get her to focus on him.
So Doctor S stated his question bluntly from the broken drum he sat on.
"Why am I still alive? I honestly assumed I would be killed instantly once the infection and spread began."
"Oh? You make it sound like you overcame death all on your own."
"This isn't anything that cool."
While answering, the man used his medical inhaler to adjust the oxygen level while using the air pressure tubes in his riding suit to squeeze his body. Together, these simulated a hyperbaric oxygen environment to externally control his brain activity. It was a lot like fiddling with a dial to dig through his memories.
"It's just that I saw *something more frightening than death* during July of 1999. The rest is an issue of priorities. I've already selected the problem I wish to conquer first, so I might seem unconcerned about lower priority issues such as my own death."
"Well, in that case, your driving force is rooted in phobia rather than philia. …Although you have some serious issues since you get as close as possible to the thing you fear instead of distancing yourself from it."
"That's just how humans work. Did you not know why those Toy Dream cities are doing such good business all over the world? We humans are a contradictory lot. We want to get as close as possible to danger while maintaining a front-row seat of absolute safety. No luxury could be greater."
"Don't try to pretend you're not a coward."

“Oh, my cowardice is the entire point. I will admit it’s pathetic, though. Even now, it could easily explode within me at any time if I didn’t tune my thoughts externally like this.”
“Is that an application of hyperbaric oxygen therapy? That said, I believe I was taught that excess oxygen intake not only leads to hyperventilation but that the reactive oxygen that changes form within your metabolism is one cause of aging.”
“I stopped caring about aging after the fear turned my hair white. You would never know it, but I’m actually a fair bit younger than I look. My hair has been like this ever since I saw you that first time. Although I’m not about to claim I’m exactly young anymore.”
Whatever Doctor S may have thought, the White Queen did not seem to have any real feelings about that.
So the twintail girl readily changed the subject.
To the man, this was like hesitantly walking through a minefield where one misstep would blow him away, but she readily announced a change of destination on a whim.
“What is with that S name?”
“Oh, this? It was originally a pseudonym I used for the long-term project with Kyousuke, but it was convenient enough and I ended up borrowing it ever since. Well, with the later Miniature Garden, it was entirely about inertia or maybe a good luck charm. That was an utter failure that didn’t match the requested specs, but it was definitely a step in the right direction. So from there, I was probably hoping for someone who showed some promise. How that turned out goes without saying.”
“Your project, hm?”
“He is my child. I will not lie about that. I simply used every research tool available to me.”
“But that is not enough to fully explain this.”
“You mean why it had to be a Shiroyama? Not even I know. I can only assume it was a divine revelation.” Doctor S smiled bitterly at his own trauma. “Oh, and it might look like Kyousuke is driven by phobia, but it’s actually philia. You can rest easy about that.”
It sounded like he too was changing the subject on a whim, but he was not actually.
“My, my.”
The White Queen smiled while happily clasping her hands in front of her chest. She looked like a girl who had received information on the boy she liked from a classmate.
This was the only way for Doctor S to access the White Queen. He could not get a single word out of her otherwise. When he was lost, when he could not see the ground below his feet, and when his soul was trapped by the fear of landmines, the only way to course correct was to speak Kyousuke’s name. That would allow him to set down his raised foot.
“I’m scared.”

Was his voice actually reaching the twintailed Queen?
And even if it was, this might not change the fate of this man in a lab coat and riding suit.
“I’m so very, very, very scared. But that is why this shiver down my spine is the one thing I can’t erase by manipulating the oxygen. How much safety can we maintain and how close can we approach danger? Some say it is the ability to control fire that makes humanity special, but I see things otherwise. Our one and only treasure is the ability to not just control fire but approach that danger and enjoy the thrill of it. There are insects that commit suicide and beasts that torment others, but no other living creature holds entirely meaningless values.”
As Doctor S spoke from the broken drum, his words were not directed at anyone in particular.
He was letting himself hear his own thoughts to apply some self-suggestion and encourage himself.
“We conquered ghosts and UFOs. We removed the fear of poetic prophets and the Aztec calendar. We can use our own words to explain the Tunguska Event and the supposed nuclear destruction of an ancient city by an Astra. We have fully researched most every mystery of the universe and the human body. We have turned it all into safe and boring attractions, leaving nothing to fear. …With the one major exception of you.”
“Iiiii seeee. So for you, what happens after death is something you either already understand or a trivial matter you can calculate out if need be. You know the equations, so you just have to leave the massive amount of calculations to a supercomputer which can work out the answer at more than a billion calculations a second.”
“Ha ha. That’s right, that’s right. The White Queen is the one thing where I can’t even find an equation to use as a starting point. No matter how I look at or frame the problem, all I get are unknowns upon unknowns. It could be zero, infinity, an imaginary number, or anything else; if I could see just one value, I could confirm the safety, mark out the danger with a dividing line, and find a way to get as close as possible to that line.”
“Humans feel both hope and fear about the things they do not understand. Once you had made your way all around the earth, the occupation of adventurer died out and the seeds of hope for the entire species were lost. Even with outer space, you could predict the majority of the star map using radio telescopes.”
“So what is your answer?”
“Do you desire your own death that badly?”
“Dying here would be simple. That is no more than an easily predicable result. Queen, surely you can bring people *a much crueler fate*.”
“Hmm. That is true.” The silver twintailed Queen placed her index finger on her slender chin. “The things you have brought into this world should indeed be called hideous, but without them, brother and I never would have met. Isn’t that enough of a reason to give you a stay of execution?”

“Akura Taisaku from the Queen’s Miniature Garden similarly pulled the selfish trigger when he could no longer bear that freefall with no guarantee of safety, but you didn’t hesitate to smash him into paste. …And I am well aware you allowed his cells to remain active so *he lived on for more than 300 hours while splattered across the walls and ceiling*. And he was aware the entire time that there was no hope at all of saving him.”
“Oh, you do know your trivia, don’t you? Did the two of you get along because you both have severe phobias? If I recall correctly, you developed the Miniature Garden and he ran it. But I can’t have you acting like that Queen and the Queen before you now are the same.” The White Queen giggled. “There is a simple reason for treating you differently from Akura. The presence of an ordinary sort of man will not change much of anything. So even if the middle point was altered somewhat, that war would have ultimately happened and brother and I would have parted ways. But you were different. That is all this is.”
“Hmm.” The inhaler man slightly adjusted the oxygen level like a tuner. “If you killed me here, disguised it as some kind of error, and ‘returned’ right away, you might just gain Kyousuke’s favor.”
“…”
The White Queen’s shoulders jumped.
But not because some gears had jammed. It was the opposite. The phrase Doctor S had spoken were the magic words to rob the silver twintailed Queen of all of her plans. Without even looking at her face, it was obvious that linking her to Kyousuke had sent pleasure signals coursing through her body.
But the strongest of the strongest suppressed it.
Doctor S calmly viewed that result.
“I see. That is a magician’s trick.” He nodded once. “You are arrogant in all things and everything you do can be judged humble when compared to what you are actually capable of. But you are afraid. You are shockingly cowardly when it comes to Kyousuke. Basically, with the obvious target of Doctor S around, Kyousuke will look elsewhere. So even if you are manipulating things from behind the scenes, you are harder to spot. That’s what this is about, isn’t it?”
Some might call it clever and some might call it cowardly, but they could not forget that this was the White Queen. It was highly irregular for her to even take failure and loss into account when she put together a plan.
“But even before that, the core factor in you and Kyousuke parting ways at the Queen’s Miniature Garden was murder. *A mere murder caused that*. But I am his father. Whatever he might say, you cannot imagine how much more your relationship will be twisted if you take it a step further and *kill his parent*. I can see why you would be afra-…”
The White Queen silently tilted her head.
The pull of gravity caused her silver hair to flow creepily over.

And a moment later, the Queen's slender arm stabbed into the center of Doctor S's chest before he could finish his sentence.
It truly only took an instant.
It was as smooth as sticking one's hand into a mass of custard and yet not a drop of blood was spilt.
The White Queen's right hand had pierced the researcher's chest far too deftly. No, that was not simple destruction. It was a type of spiritual healing. While completely ignoring the pectoralis major, diaphragm, ribs, sternum, and various arteries and veins in the way, the White Queen easily pulled something out.
He did not even have time to stand up from the broken drum in surprise.
He was forbidden to take any unpermitted action while in the presence of Her Majesty.
That was simply how the world worked.
"Father."
The mass of muscles in her hand was pulsing. It was someone's heart.
The Queen's strongest was not limited to pure physical strength.
She could bring out the greatest skill in *every single field*.
"I respect you for bringing brother into this world, but I have no intention of getting to know my in-laws well enough to live in a two-generation household."
"…"
The frightening part was not how she removed his heart with no pain or resistance.
It was the fact that she could bring hand-to-hand combat to this level. If she wanted, she could remove all of Doctor S's organs and rearrange them as she saw fit. It was just like moving a human brain into a pig or sheep developed for organ transplants. No, it need not be organic. If she felt like having some fun, she could create a human-faced dog or even a human-faced train. She could easily create a chimera that would cause anyone who saw it to lose their mind.
"Please do your very, very, very best not to get between my brother and me. I may not look it, but I can become a tad indiscriminate when it comes to him. Even if you are his father, I might do something inappropriate without thinking."
"…Oh, how scary. It would seem this thrill ride still has room for improvement. If not for the experimental guiderail named Kyousuke, I would have been tossed from the roller coaster."
"Yes, I suppose so. Your unsightly racing heartrate is probably caused by noradrenaline, so it would come from the fear and shock based on your phobia."
"It really is scary."
But that was the entire point.
Doctor S's confidence was renewed after seeing this madness that would have made anyone look away. Not even the god in heaven could restrain

this ultimate strongest. And there was but one person in the world who contained the possibility of holding her reins.
Only Shiroyama Kyousuke. Completing that failure was the only option.
“I am a priest, not a shrine maiden. Directly touching you is meaningless; my goal is to approach as close as possible. I wish to safely enjoy the world’s greatest and most dangerous freefall, but I do not actually wish to jump to my death.”
“That is fine then.”
The White Queen grinned and returned the heart in her right hand to Doctor S’s chest. It was a casual action, like someone placing their father’s pocket watch back on the shelf.
There was no red stain on her white glove and that eternally unsullied white spoke.
“Now, then. I think it’s time I got serious about teasing brother. Hee hee hee! Any chance to directly touch him is valuable. …I can’t have him growing accustomed to my appearances. Each and every one of our trysts needs to feel fresh and new! If I am going to show him just how impatiently I have been waiting to make contact with him, I have to make sure I leave an impression: kaboom!!”
“I’m hardly one to talk, but…”
“Yes?”
“You really are cruel.”
The White Queen was entirely unfazed by his great insult.
She placed her hands on her cheeks as her eyes grew damp, her breaths grew heated, and a tremor ran down her spine.
“That is because I love him…!!”

Part 5

“Hey!!”
“Nyahh!?”
Kyousuke heard a bizarre cry and then saw Biondetta grabbing onto Olivia’s skinny hips. The little girl was facing forward with her butt sticking out and Biondetta was preparing to spank her. Even if she was wearing a swimsuit below, Olivia seemed worried about her miniskirt and pareo in this pose, so she kicked her skinny legs around, blushed, and tried to bite at the older girl.
“Wait, what do you think you’re doing to me!?”
“What am I doing!? You’re the one that tried to sneak over and remove the fuse to my Incense Grenades so they wouldn’t activate! That really is a life or death issue!!”
“…Tch.”

“That click of the tongue settles it: I’m definitely spanking this ass!!”
“Nyahh!?”
“Those are the laws in my country!!”
“What country is that!?”
The two of them argued back and forth, but Olivia skillfully escaped Biondetta and fled toward Kyousuke. She circled behind him and used him as a shield. Her swimsuit must have gotten oddly twisted while in the waitress demon’s grasp because she messed with the shoulder straps inside her decorative collar and the butt within her pareo.
“Look at that incarnation of violence, Onii-chan! You need to keep away from someone like that!!”
Olivia was not contracted with anyone, so she could not maintain her memories without a summoner or vessel in her field of vision. That meant she could not sneak around when no one else was around and would have to use bold pickpocketing techniques and prestidigitation if she was going to do anything.
Vigor seemed to escape Biondetta’s mouth like steam.
“Sir, please move out of the way. It is my duty to deliver a finishing blow to that insolent ass.”
“Nn! The White Queen is definitely the only person for you, Onii-chan. The Queen is kind, so she wouldn’t get mad about something as trivial as this.”
Kyousuke did not have it in him to correct her ridiculous assessment, but that was not his focus at the moment anyway.
“Aika, have you managed to check with the satellite yet?”
A military satellite might sound like something quite special, but the satellite network was not actually all that sturdy.
The bikini girl responded via his smartphone.
“Well, no matter how advanced things get, they can’t escape the nature of wireless connections. They can strengthen the directionality all they want; the signal still scatters in other directions and the opposite is just as true. I can read from and write to the signal all I want. Although no matter how useful this is, I’m still stuck in the position of logistical support…”
“Meaning?”
“You need to give more credit to your proud shut-in here. And with my eternal rival Olivia Highland showing up while I was out of the loop, I am seriously worried about your future, Onii-chan!!”
That put a smug look on Olivia’s face as she clung to his arm.
“Ee hee hee. Even if we’re on other sides of the world, there is no separating two souls who were truly meant to be together. Grin, grin.”
“You thief!! Do you want me to fire the seven space station tools on top of your head!?”
“Tee hee. And a school swimsuit is the standard…no, it’s justice. I mean, a bikini little sister is just mixing up the symbols to the point of incomprehensibility.”
“Via.”

“Agrbrbrbh!! O-Onii-chan, you’re not blameless here either! When did you two get so close again!? I-Is there really magic in a school swimsuit!?”
“Please, Aika, don’t you go crazy, too.”
“Pant, pant, gasp, gasp… Okay, okay. Here’s the satellite feed. Remember that I’m the truly useful little sister of your soul. Bridesmaid has hacked into and altered the records in the government and private satellites, but they shouldn’t underestimate the true administrative privileges of Government…”
When they saw the image sent from Aika, Kyousuke’s group had very nearly accomplished their goal.
Houbi Village had been overwritten.
Bridesmaid had used their landing Repliglass, which resembled sports kites, to carry supplies from the beach and they had set up their own camp using synthetic tents. Each tent was the size of a harbor warehouse and they had also built some diesel power generation bases and a labyrinth of trenches and seawater-filled ditches.
The silver-haired shrine maiden, Meinokawa Aoi, sounded exasperated.
She pressed her soft cheek against the boy as she peered at the small screen from the side.
“This is incredible. There is no sign of the original village.”
“But it’s a simple matter.” Kyousuke sighed. “This is a temple. And on an urban planning level.”
“You mean like Edo or Kyoto?” asked Waitress Biondetta as she tilted her head and gave a food pellet to her white snake.
“That’s right,” confirmed Kyousuke. “It can be feng shui or whatever else, but they’re using the terrain itself to guide the flow of a great power and gain a special advantage from it. A temple uses four walls to cut itself off from the world and opens an entrance in a specific direction to allow the wind through in order to invite in a higher being with a divine name belonging to a specific element, and there are countless examples of pulling it off at the level of a city like this. By creating their fortress according to plan, Bridesmaid seems to have successfully invited in the White Queen.”
Their landing operation had involved 18,000 rockets and plenty of landing craft.
But Bridesmaid had not wasted anything.
“Hm? But, sir, but they only built up their temple of tents after firing all those rockets on the city. Then what about the rockets that should have fallen on Olivia’s head?”
“They came from the ocean.” Kyousuke’s expression remained unchanged. He did not even bother questioning Olivia about it. “We just have to assume they prepared in advance. I’m guessing they built a temple on the ocean floor so it couldn’t be seen by satellite. Then they extended that to include Houbi Village on land. I mean, that labyrinth of trenches is filled with seawater, right?”

Of course, if the ocean-bottom temple was enough to fulfill their needs, they would not have needed to remake Houbi Village. It may have been like a bridgehead giving them a foothold from the sea to land versus the actual fortified line taking them deeper inland.
“That would be how we were controlling fate and manipulating probability. They were building a royal capital that invites good fortune.”
(But good fortune for whom…?)
It all seemed to be on such a grand and exaggerated scale at first, but it only made sense if it connected to the White Queen who they worshiped. And only about a day had passed between leveling the village and constructing their fortress. Bridesmaid had done an incredibly speedy job of laying out the groundwork and remaking all of Houbi Village into a temple for the Queen. It normally took centuries to build a grand temple, so this alone was an extraordinary accomplishment.
“The permanently summoned Queen in the center is different from the infected Queens who are spreading out like a house of mirrors,” said Kyousuke. “And if we tear down the temple structure, the permanent summon system will malfunction. So unlike the infected Queens, the permanently summoned one will blur with static. There should be a slight lag before it reaches the infected ones. …Let’s use that to locate their core. The infected Queens are a false reflection, so we don’t have to fight them. Destroying the one at the core should cause them all to disappear.”
“So it’s sabotage, is it? Oh, this is sounding right up my alley.”
“Biondetta.” Kyousuke made sure to calm down the vengeance demon who could not stop grinning. “We need to use multiple observation methods. I’d like to use Aika’s satellite image and also send out a few drones. As long as you know how they’re made, you just need to take apart a smartphone and an electric shaver to make one. Even if Bridesmaid interferes, I want to at least get a blow in.”
“…What if they use Incense Grenades? No *cam-er-uh*s or *sen-ser*s work inside an Artificial Sacred Ground, right?”
“Wherever they concentrate the Incense Grenades will be where they’re protecting the core Queen.”
But that left another problem.
“Boo.”
Olivia puffed out her cheeks, fidgeted with her double braids, and spoke up while showing no concern for the undeveloped bodylines showing through her school swimsuit.
She wanted the two people she loved to make up(?).
“Even if you know which one, the Queen is still the Queen. Can you beat her, Onii-chan?”
“…”
Yes, that was the biggest problem.

Just because she had multiplied did not mean each individual White Queen's value had dropped. The Queen was still the Queen. Challenging her head-on without a plan was a fool's errand.
Identifying the core Queen was the same as finding a deadly precipice. Approaching that Queen was no different from reducing his own lifespan. This place was more frightening than a jungle roamed by a man-eating tiger. Misjudging his distance from death would get him eaten in the very first attack.
He could not think of himself as special.
No matter what, he had not left the category of human.
"We'll just have to cheat," said Kyousuke.
He turned back toward the silver-haired shrine maiden named Meinokawa Aoi.
He recalled each piece of lab equipment and the explanations Aoi had given in that cruise ship.
"How long will it take to complete?"
"Hm. I adjusted it for the expanded components seen in your plans, but you can see how much is in glass container there."
With a cry of "oryah", Aoi leaned against Kyousuke to turn him around using her soft warmth.
"Blood worship can be found all across the globe. Some see shed blood as unclean, but others see the blood of important and holy people to be holy. There are simply too many examples to list off."
"So by adjusting the balance between good and evil from the outside, you can create an affinity for a specific Material, right?"
"Blood is a biometric and an individual identifier, but it can also be readily altered by your eating habits or by drinking perfume. Just how many products are advertised as giving you clean blood? You can even go further and directly alter the quality of your blood by transplanting a heart or marrow. We just have to take that even further."
Her eyes were directed toward a thick, wet sound.
That kitchen contained a variety of lab equipment and a roller coaster of glass tubes. A red liquid floated in a clear cylindrical container that held nearly 20 liters.
"We have no time," said Meinokawa Aoi. "I would normally like to create an artificial organ or marrow to produce the blood and then directly implant that in my body, but that would take too long. Our only option is to directly create the necessary artificial blood, inject it into my veins, and temporarily change the quality of my blood to tune me to the Material. …It should be finished soon. The contents need to be compressed until they glow like a red jewel."
"Jewel Blood, hm?"
"That Western name doesn't fit the traditional atmosphere, but there's no helping that. We were always greedy."
It looked like it would take about an hour longer.

The Blood-Sign method was a contract between a human and a Material, so the better the human would fit in the pages of a biology textbook, the easier the Material could recognize them and synchronize with them. Olivia with her royal blood, royal flesh, and royal soul was the extreme form of that. Aoi was using that to consider the traits of an individual Material and create a vessel that would best be recognized by it. It was not the best comparison, but a carnivore's sense of smell was quite different from an herbivore's. The silver-haired shrine maiden was apparently greatly altering the amplitude of that.

The smaller the discrepancy between them, the less the resistance and friction. This was necessary to summon a non-existent Material into her body.

"This will complete the artificial vessel you need, but what about the all-important Material? You plan to create a new Unexplored-class and embed it in the other world for the sole purpose of defeating the White Queen, don't you? And its divine name will be constructed only from the vowels which are not dyed by the Sound Ranges of the Three. You showed me the theoretical anatomical drawing, but that isn't enough to create it. Are you going to use a secret life-creating technique such as the alchemical homunculi or Kabbalic golems used for the Regulation-class?"

"I have an idea in mind."

"…Hm. Whatever it is, the trick will be how to shave off time and prioritize efficiency."

Aoi glanced over at the collection of equipment filling the kitchen.

She was saying those tools could create most anything, but you could not use them for more than one thing at a time. While creating the Jewel Blood needed to alter her own body, they could not construct the anti-Queen Unexplored-class. That said, they could not win without both, so they could not just ignore one or the other.

"This is going to be tricky."

"I agree with you there, but physical work is not all a summoner needs to do. While I'm resting my body, I can start on some mental work."

The most important piece of mental work was running strategy simulations against the opposing summoner.

"Biondetta."

"Yes?"

"Do you think Doctor S is still alive? Or did he die when all those White Queens showed up?"

"Hmm. That's not an easy question to answer, but I'd like to suggest 7-to-3 that he's still alive."

"Why?"

"Based on the satellite images, the fortress temple created on top of Houbi Village has maintained order. If a group of White Queens was on a rampage, it should be filled with the corpses and blood of Bridesmaid now that she doesn't need them."

“Well, I suppose that is what would happen.”
“Of course, I can’t deny the possibility that Doctor S *personally incurred the Queen’s wrath* and got himself killed, so that’s why it’s 7-to-3. It is extremely difficult to predict the White Queen’s actions using logic and efficiency, but she does seem to provide unrestricted use of her power to anyone who will allow her to have fun with you, sir.”
“…”
Overall, her thoughts were the same as Kyousuke’s.
That meant he probably was not letting his hatred cloud his judgment, so he would go with that.
“Who is he?”
Biondetta had shared a portion of his past, but she had to ask about this part.
She had only shared the Queen’s Miniature Garden portion of his past, so she knew nothing of what came before that.
“…My father. But not as part of the Fifteen Siblings Project. I mean my real father.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke slowly sighed as he answered.
His thoughts turned to the surname of Shiroyama.
“We lived in an unremarkable house in an ordinary Japanese city. It was me, my dad, my mom, and then my little sister. It was exactly the kind of normal life anyone could imagine.”
“?”
Biondetta and Meinokawa Aoi were both already frowning.
What he described was perfectly normal, but it was strange to think of *the* Shiroyama Kyousuke placed on rails like that.
The silver-haired shrine maiden summed it up in a question.
She pressed the back of her head against his temple as she did so.
“But that wouldn’t teach you your excellent combat technique, would it? And where did you and Doctor S come in contact with the Summoning Ceremony?”
“That’s right.” Kyousuke cringed but readily admitted it. “That life was clearly strange. Everything I had thought was normal had been linked to my elite training. Everything from the food I ate to the positions of the mechanical pencil and eraser on my study desk.”
“…”
“And that was frightening enough. I mean, special facilities like the Miniature Garden try to hide, but they can’t really. Anyone who can see the underside of the world will notice them. What Doctor S did was like building a missile using parts from a hardware store.”
He called himself a missile.
A precision-guided missile that had once cornered so very many people.
Kyousuke recalled the inner voice that had guided the Miniature Garden to destruction.
“So…what was Doctor S?” asked Aoi.

“Who knows. The name Shiroyama may not have had any real meaning to it. His behavior has a Government scent to it, so he may have been using household goods to stably produce an unofficial unit for use alongside the government ones. I mean, if he had succeeded, it would have created an age where any house or apartment could be used to mass-produce people on my level.”
Anyone who knew Shiroyama Kyousuke would feel their minds going blank at that suggestion.
That could seriously have thrown the world into disorder.
“I don’t know if Doctor S succeeded or failed and whether he gave up or was stopped by someone else, but he abandoned the project after bringing me fairly close to completion. In the confusion of the divorce, the entire family fell apart. Since I had no relatives left, I was collected by the appropriate organization. After proving my worth by completing a few jobs with the knowledge and skills already placed inside my mind, I was sent to the Miniature Garden. …And it all went so smoothly that it may have all been predetermined.”
“What…do you think?”
“It’s on such a large scale that it’s impossible to grasp the whole of it. I know my memories of that single house are not going to guide me to the answer.” Kyousuke breathed a heavy sigh. “And I don’t know if this was planned as well, but a few of the faces are blotted out and I can’t draw out that information. Like my mom and little sister. Who were they? I hope they were simply part of the cast and they were able to safely withdraw.”
That meant he did not know much about Doctor S.
But if that researcher had “created” Shiroyama Kyousuke’s foundation, some things could be deduced from that foundation.
“You can’t implant in someone else what doesn’t exist in yourself,” said Kyousuke. “No matter how insane he is, he is still my parent. And as his child, he created my skill as a summoner.”
“So he’ll use similar tactics?”
“We can’t say much since I’m sure we have our individual idiosyncrasies and preferences, but we can think of our skills as about the same. And he should be able to predict all of the choices I will make. Because he created me this way.”
The previous battle had been settled by Meinokawa Aoi, not Kyousuke. She had used her position as a fully artificial Joruri Method to remove her head, which Doctor S had failed to predict.
Even if Kyousuke planned everything out in advance, it was impossible to know what would happen.
“It’s also easy for me to predict what Doctor S will do,” said Freedom Award 903. “I just have to imagine what I would do using my skills if I used such a long sword. Since the skills at the foundation are the same, the differences will come from the surrounding environment.”

Part 6

Houbi Village had been conquered by Bridesmaid and the many infected White Queens.

Nevertheless, there was still no word of Kyousuke's group being captured. The declining village had limited transportation access, so holding all of the exits was not difficult. Not to mention that it was not just reckless but insolent to think you could break out when surrounded by the White Queen whose sensory organs had expanded infinitely beyond enlightenment or divine visions.

In that case…

"They haven't escaped outside," said Doctor S as he stood up from the broken drum. "Are they actually rushing to the center?"

A White Queen joined him, but it was no longer possible to tell *which* Queen this was. And for him, it did not matter *which* one it was. She was the one and only thing in the world he did not understand in the slightest, so this merely completed that definition.

One of the Queens spoke softly.

"My. Then is this the beginning of the expected game of hide-and-seek?"

"We went out of our way to make this remote village our stage, so we need to do this right. If we're going to be hunting them through the mountains late at night, I'd like for us bring a bunch of torches with us. Not so much for the light as providing the obvious visual of a great mob to force as much despair onto Kyousuke's group as possible. This just isn't the environment for IR goggles."

"Hmm. The fact that we aren't the actual residents of some frightening village of freaks works against us there."

"Just think of us as witch-hunting rioters visiting from elsewhere. Either way, once you turn the entire place into a crazed human hunt, the fear kind of happens on its own."

"My, my☆"

"Whether inborn or learned, people are susceptible to predefined categories…in other words, genres. That includes primal fears such as heights and enclosed spaces and it also includes cultural fears like the guillotine or a chainsaw. No, this isn't even limited to that one emotion. For example, the best way to get an enemy spy to betray their side is not money or the barrel of a gun; it's the single bowl of soup given by a normal local when the spy is starving and freezing. The trick is to disguise it all as a coincidence. That too is an obvious emotional reaction. Humans feel unreasonably compelled *to cry* when things follow a predefined course of events."

"Like an abandoned puppy in the rain?"

"Or a movie where a sick kid dies." He spread out a map on a table below the large tent. "We could always use our numbers to perform a thorough search of Houbi Village, but if we're going to supply some fresh fear, it has

to look like we can see everything. Let's try to make some predictions. If we concentrate on a single location, Kyousuke's group should try to take advantage of it. And giving them a hint of hope will only increase the pain. The sense of pain recedes from a frozen hand, so we need to warm it up a little."
"Hee hee hee." The Queen seemed unable to hold in the laughter. "You sadist."
"That makes two of us."
With that, Doctor S casually dropped the tip of his knife onto the map.
And it stabbed into…
"The remains of the crater lake at the mountain peak. Let's corner them there. With all the caves riddling the mountain like a spider web, Kyousuke's group will think they have a chance to slip past us. Not that we'll actually give them the opportunity."
"What makes you so confident?"
"You must already know the answer, but fine. First of all, Kyousuke's group has no intention of falling back. Now that he's seen you, he's sure to challenge you no matter how outmatched he is. That tells us how to look at this: Kyousuke is hopelessly surrounded by countless White Queens, so what hope will he try to cling to?"
"I see."
"Since he still has Meinokawa Aoi as a vessel, he will not give up on creating that new Unexplored-class. Based on the modern translations of the Joruri Method diagrams in Azalea's research documents, it would be difficult to create an entirely new one in a short period of time, but he should be able to expand Aoi's body to meet his needs. That means he will try to visit a modification facility."
And this was Houbi Village, headquarters of the Joruri Method.
Most of the village had been wiped out by the rockets and Repliglass unit, but it was highly unlikely that all of the facilities had been destroyed.
"We destroyed all of the surface structures, but if they had lab equipment hidden around as backups, those spares were likely kept in underground tunnels, ships, and RVs," said Doctor S. "And since they haven't been caught yet, Kyousuke's group must have headed inward instead of outward. That further limits the possibilities."
"Isn't there a giant network of underground tunnels below this village?"
"Sorry, but I doubt he would use one of those."
"?"
"Why? Because he's Alice (with) Rabbit."
The inhaler man breathed a muffled sigh behind the transparent mask.
And then he chuckled.
"I had completely forgotten, but this village has a fair number of residents. Whether they are aware of the Summoning Ceremony or not, that network of tunnels will be the lifeline for all of the survivors. The limit is already set at two or three days, but if we begin a more thorough search for Shiroyama

Kyousuke, it will expose all those hidden people to danger. So Kyousuke will not share their living space. No matter how illogical any other option might be.”
That left only one possibility.
And the answer had already been given by the knife on the map.
“If he’s eliminated the tunnels as options, this is the most likely place: the cruise ship left behind in the dried-up crater lake. It should be big enough to hold all the necessary lab equipment. And if not, they can use the cooking equipment left in the industrial kitchen to improvise. After all, kitchen equipment and lab equipment are a lot alike.”
As twisted as their relationship was, they were still father and son.
At times like this, Doctor S and Shiroyama Kyousuke could predict each other’s actions even from a distance.
“Let the hunt begin.”
The father stared at the son’s game board and moved a piece.
Once they had a goal, the greater than 10,000 White Queens would begin to move as one. And any member of that group was powerful enough to destroy the entire galaxy.
Doctor S continued speaking as if to see what she would do.
“It’s time to overwhelm him with fear and despair. With this, your experiment can advance to the next stage, Queen.”
“Oh? You’re still making battle preparations? Isn’t having me with you enough?”
The White Queen said that because Doctor S reached for the long sheath placed on the table. No, that was not all. He also touched his vessel.
But that no longer referred to Olivia Highland.
He had readily ended that contract. She had served her purpose once she had brought him to Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He was now using his usual animal vessel. More accurately, it was an extraordinarily large Joro spider with a distinct black and yellow striped pattern. Except a great many of them were lined up, each in their own bug cage.
In this case, the phrase “palm-sized” did not bring to mind a small size or sense of comfort. This was far too bizarre for that.
But at the same time, spiders were a beneficial bug and some folklore had them as the targets of jinxes.
And if the inborn talent of a vessel was hard to come by, then you only had to increase the denominator. If you wanted a surefire method to obtain a one-in-a-billion talent, you only had to search through a billion people. A spider’s egg sac would contain tens of thousands of lives. From there, you could use Mendelian cross-breeding by taking the specimens with slightly greater traits as a vessel, placing them in the same bug cage, and adjusting the temperature and humidity to fake the seasonal cycle. That let you repeat the generational cycle in a short period of time.

Doing this with humans would be frowned upon, but the hurdle was much lower for other life forms.
Just like researchers could do live experiments with rats even if human experimentation would not be immediately possible.
That wise and sensible man had learned his lesson.
Not all experiments needed to use humans. Using Shiroyama Kyousuke too much had worn the boy out and caused all sorts of problems. The self-proclaimed “professional” summoners who claimed to be entirely immersed in the underside of the world would apparently let their human side show fairly easily. As long as it did not interfere with their own interests anyway.
“Oh, dear. I see there is no lovely trust between us whatsoever.”
“This is the digitally-calculated answer. I do not want a single vessel with exceptional talent or specs backed by willpower. It’s simply inefficient to use the human species. The short lifespan is a bottleneck when it comes to bugs, but if I maintain an environment in which I can always scoop up the next specimen from the large denominator, I can always have a stable supply.”
No matter what, they were always a target of observation and an experiment animal.
In a way, the relationship between researcher and specimen was an absolute one.
As Doctor S casually spoke with the White Queen, he opened the lid to one of the many bug cages. The large spider deftly used its long legs to crawl out, onto the back of his hand, and up his arm to his shoulder.
Perhaps for ease of observation, each of the bug cages was given two numbers. One number for the row and one for the column. And the form those numbers took could not have been simpler:
“Block 7 House 12.”
The clear inhaler man recited it in a singsong voice.
He also increased the oxygen level and tightened the air pressure tubes in his riding suit to increase his brain activity.
“Block 7 House 12, hm? It would probably be best to use the ones around here for the next round of cross-breeding.”
Yes.
They sounded just like the addresses of perfectly normal homes.

Part 7

Even if the world did not revolve around them, the others still had to fight for their lives.
“Crap, crap, crap, crap…”

In this case, it was the black-haired shrine maiden named Meinokawa Renge.
She had already experienced Bridesmaid's insanity back in Toy Dream 35. Rockets had poured down like rain, but she had avoided a lethal injury by escaping into her home's ice room and into the vast network of underground tunnels. However, things had not ended there. The soldiers in control of the village would notice the absence of corpses and they had to be finding the entrances to the tunnels.
Houbi Village's tunnels had become a deadly dungeon.
Turning the corner and finding a summoner or Repliglass soldier could bring a quick end to your life. Renge was a professional summoner in Freedom, but this had progressed too far for that to matter.
It was the Queen.
The White Queen was wandering around.
And not just one or two of her. A great swarm of them inundated the village like zombies. To make matters even more frightening, they were all residents of Houbi Village. These same people had greeted her and shared leftover food with her until now. But as soon as they were grabbed, dragged down, surrounded, and bitten by the Queens' canine teeth, they became the same. Renge had yet to fully process this.
The one blessing was how little interest they showed in her. No matter what might happen, that monster was only interested in Shiroyama Kyousuke. She did not care if anyone mocked her as a coward.
But in these extreme circumstances, simply taking her twin sister with her and keeping her lungs and heart moving was a major accomplishment.
"R-Renge, will we be safe here?"
"Shh."
"And I'm hungry…"
Doing a bit of research in books or on the internet would tell you that humans could live for several days on nothing but water and that stranded people would not starve on the very first day, but that all assumed they were in an ordinary condition. A situation on the verge of death would greatly shake your autonomic nerves and biological functions. When in a state of extreme exhaustion, it was not uncommon for people to quickly lose the ability to keep walking and for no amount of water to soothe their dry throat.
Black-haired Renge and blonde Higan wore *zori* sandals[1]. and white *tabi* socks[2] which were not at all suited for outdoor use and they soon arrived at the large underground lake that altered the currents and dampness that kept people away from the sacred ground. The complex tunnels with plenty of blind spots were certainly frightening, but wide open areas were also a problem. They of course had to check behind large rocks and in the deep shadows, but they also had to look up at the limestone cave's ceiling to thoroughly ensure their safety. After all, they were up against the White Queen and she could be hiding anywhere.

(It’s safe…isn’t it?)
Renge gulped.
“Higan, there’s a shelter hut on the edge of this lake. Let’s use this opportunity to get some blankets and food, okay?”
“Uuuh… Finally, some food…”
Finally? You just ate at lunchtime, you old granny. Renge wanted to make that complaint, but Higan’s condition did not seem normal. That concerned Renge whose artificial body moved as accurately as a clock’s hands. They looked just like twins, but she began to wonder if she could never be human in any meaningful sense.
But regardless.
They had no idea if it would be any help in their bright red and white shrine maiden outfits, but they crouched low and moved quickly along the edge of the lake. They soon arrived at a small wooden shelter hut that resembled a small shrine. It was meant to help in case the cave collapsed or someone was buried alive on the sightseeing course. Renge opened the double doors and looked inside.
“Some of it’s gone, but this should be enough. Did someone visit here ahead of us? What do you think, Higan? Higan???”
There was no response.
Renge quickly turned around and found the familiar blonde girl was not there, so she ran out of the hut.
“Uuuh…”
Higan was curled up by the edge of the lake and she scooped up some of the water in her hands like she could not wait any longer.
“Wait, stop! There are water bottles you can drink!!”
Renge frantically grabbed Higan’s hands and made her dump out the water. The water might look clean, but the amount of germs in it could not be judged by eye. Even famous regional water was processed before it was sold. Taking a bath might be fine, but you had to be careful when drinking it. Higan was already under a lot of psychological stress with those monstrous Queens wandering around and if she was taken out by food poisoning, their odds of survival dropped even further. Plus, Higan’s situation was bad enough already if she was so hungry she felt the need to fill her stomach with water.
“Here, Higan. I’d rather not light a fire here, but they have bread and biscuits that don’t need to be cooked.”
“This is enough for me…”
“Don’t say that. Higan, you really liked the canned food when the typhoon came through, remember? You said that was your only chance to eat things like that. Now let’s go check inside the shelter hut.”
Renge tried to forcibly cheer her sister up and then pulled her to her feet. At that very moment, she noticed something on the path to the shelter hut. She had not noticed it before, but there was no way she would have

overlooked something like this when she was so on edge that the stains on the walls looked like faces to her.
Which meant…
(Huh? Did it wash up???)
The lake did not have waves as large as the ocean, but it was different from the water in a wash basin. Since water flowed in and flowed out, there were some waves which washed in and out at the edge. So had this been floating on the surface or sunk at the bottom of the lake until it was finally washed up here?
It looked like a thick and bent piece of driftwood.
But it was oddly white for a tree branch.
And it drew an alluring curve.
“R-Renge…”
“Higan?”
“Is that…?”
The blonde sister trembled and rubbed her hands against her shrine maiden outfit. Almost like she was trying to rub off some kind of strange impurity.
Almost like she had touched something she should not have.
But Higan had only touched the clear lake water.
They had no idea how many germs it contained, but it at least looked clean.
“Is that…? Renge, is that…!?”
“…”
Guided by her sister’s pale face, Renge turned her head again. And she once more viewed the driftwood washed up a short distance away.
No.
That object with five points sticking out from the end was…
“Urp!?”

Part 8

Things were set in motion at around 11 PM.
“I can see multiple light sources on the satellite feed. They’re probably torches,” said Aika via Kyousuke’s smartphone. “The hunt has begun, Onii-chan. Are they avoiding IR goggles because machines are weak against Incense Grenades?”
“It’s also possible they have a group in goggles mixed into the darkness between those obvious lights.”
“…”
Biondetta made that observation, but Kyousuke did not reply.
He considered a different possibility.
“Meinokawa Aoi.”

“I injected the Jewel Blood into my body, but what about the Anti-Queen Material!? I doubt they’ll just wait around for you to finish if you start your cooking class now!!”
The silver-haired shrine maiden fixed the collar on the swollen chest of her clothing while she observed the lab equipment in the kitchen. They had completed the Jewel Blood, so none of it was in use. Did she think they could use those mysteries of life for another project now?
“Let’s review what we need to do.” Kyousuke sighed. “First and foremost, we can’t let the group of infected White Queens catch us. They’ll just force their way through any kind of fortifications, so holing up in this ship wouldn’t be a good idea.”
“To know which Queen to defeat, we need to identify the permanently-summoned one acting as the core,” said Biondetta. “To do that, we need to cause a certain amount of damage to the fortress temple Bridesmaid has constructed across Houbi Village. Then we find the Queen that ‘blurs’.”
Bridesmaid had likely also constructed a temple at the bottom of the ocean in preparation for their attack, but they could ignore that for now. If that had been enough for the full-power, permanently-summoned Queen and the infected ones, they would not have had to mess with Houbi Village in the first place.
It was possible that everything on the surface was an elaborate decoy, but that was going too far out of their way. For one thing, the term “temple” never would have come to mind without seeing it through the Government satellite. A decoy was useless if the mistaken answer was not easy to find. That would be like placing a frigate directly above a submarine you wanted to hide in the ocean.
“And I guess it goes without saying, but we need to construct your trump card!” added Aoi. “No matter which one we’re talking about, the Queen is the Queen. Facing her head-on without a proper plan will only get us killed!!”
They did not have time to go through it all one step at a time. They would be surrounded by White Queens before they finished.
So they needed to create a powerful current.
They had to construct a bold shortcut that allowed them to clear several hurdles with a single action.
And there was one way of doing that.
“Biondetta.”
“Yes.”
“Select some ingredients from the kitchen supplies. *Because of the environment we’re in here,* you are guaranteed to choose the right answer assuming there is a right answer there. So you just have to reach into the lottery box and we can complete our toy without delay. Let’s make this interesting.”
“Yes, sir!!”

Part 9

The hunt continued as a great many infected Queens with identical specs clogged up all of the mountain paths. What was the first step needed to escape from here and begin their counterattack?
This was their answer:
Biondetta used her specialty to blow up the ground below the cruise ship. She had only needed to destroy a small piece sticking out.
The ship had been *caught on* the mountain slope, so it quickly picked up speed in a deadly slide.

Part 10

Once Kyousuke's group felt the power of inertia in a different way than a pure fall, they began the descent on the world's largest surfboard.
The hunt had them completely surrounded, but the hunters had generally been following the routes up the mountain to prevent anyone from descending. By ignoring those existing routes and heading straight down a steep slope, they could slip right past those hunters.
And the cruise ship descending the slope was far heavier and faster than a crane's wrecking ball. Even if they were built to military standards, the structures larger than harbor warehouses were only synthetic tents. They would be easily destroyed when something like this slammed into them.
After that, they only had to let Aika from Government watch the satellite feed to see which White Queen first blurred from the noise of the destruction. That would be the permanently-summoned one that acted as a core for all the others.
"Ahhh hah hahhhh!!
Bravoooooo

mountain's terrain, so it was only possible for the White Queen who could run along a vertical wall.
"Broootherrr…"
"Ee hee hee, ah ha ha."
"Shall I join you,
broootherrrr

If *that* already existed, he only had to use his Blood-Sign to knock the Petals into the Spots in order. No matter how powerful the White Queen was, she was still a Material. Her attacks could tear white holes in the world itself and that could eliminate the Spots, but as long as he kept that in mind, he could manipulate the Petals as he saw fit.
This was his field now.
Even if the infected Queens gathered on the ship, he had developed this Unexplored-class for precisely this purpose. Once he successfully summoned that, he would have the foundation for a Chain. He could begin a wondrous scenario in which he defeated Queen after Queen until he reached the permanently-summoned Queen in the center.
And.
And.
And.
The Incense Grenade detonated. The incense mixed specifically for him swiftly scattered out and established the 20m cube of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
This was the end.
He had embedded his Unexplored-class in the other world. He had the artificial vessel needed for it.
Even if all of the Three had raised the white flag…
Even if every other human adored her, feared her, and had ultimately given up…
He would not stop here.
This was not enough to hinder Shiroyama Kyousuke.
The only remaining task was searching out the permanently-summoned Queen. This was not a pessimistic search in which he located the source of the threat to keep his distance. It was an offensive search in which he marched across the wide world to reach that location and accurately crush it.
Aim.
Lock on.
She was no longer the absolute peak of the peak. Nothing remained the strongest forever. She was only his prey and she could be pursued and hunted down if he went through the necessary steps.
This time. This time humanity would complete its counterattack. The colorless Unexplored-class constructed only from the vowels and built up specifically for use against the White Queen would sweep aside the infected ones and smash the central White Queen.
Or so it should have been.
But in that very moment, Shiroyama Kyousuke felt a hopeless chill run down his spine.
It took an instant.
Truly only an instant.
A pure white attack forcibly ripped off Shiroyama Kyousuke’s right arm.

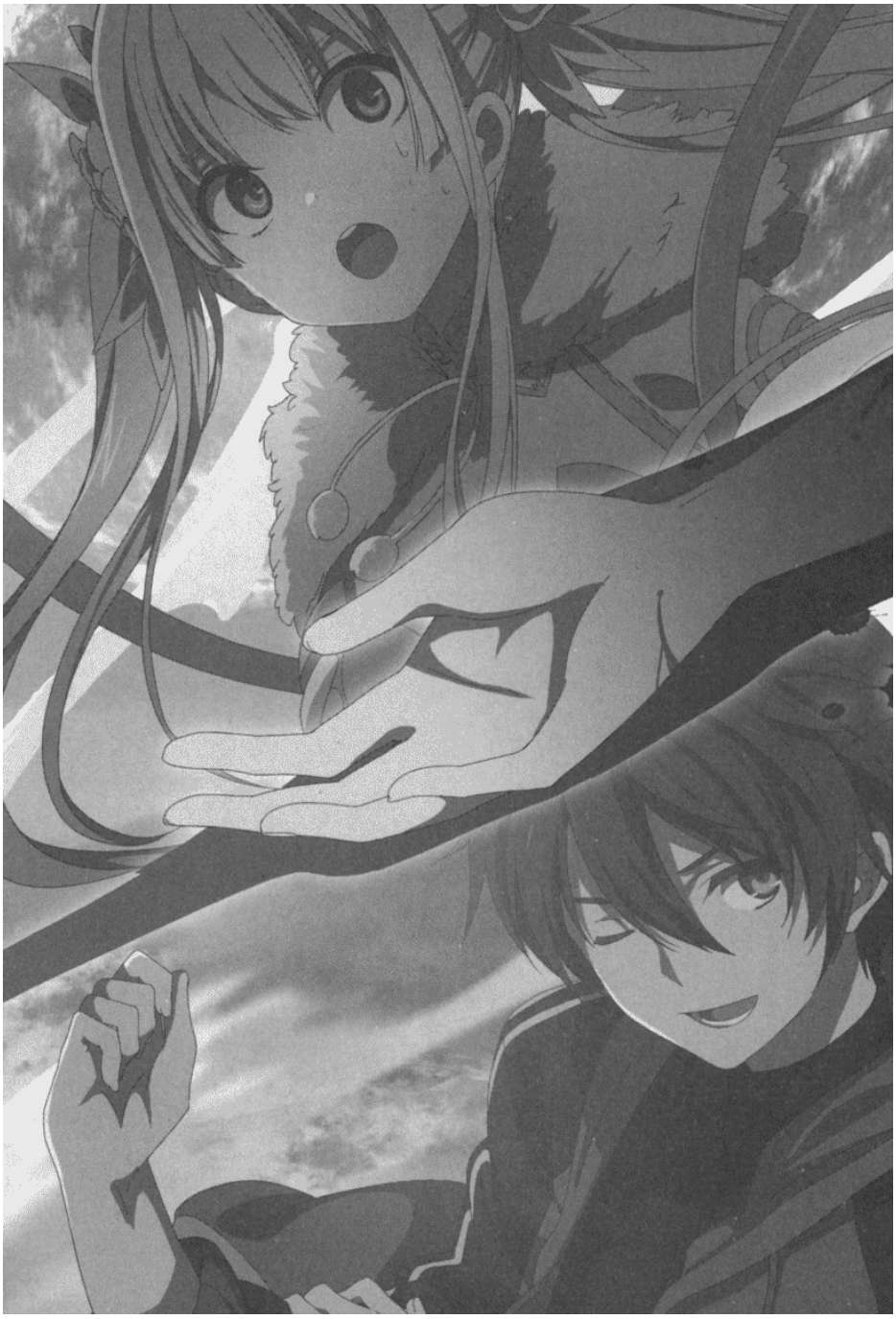
And it had come from the vessel standing behind him.
A dark red liquid gushed out of his hoodie's torn sleeve and he looked back before the pain signals could reach his brain.
Time seemed to freeze and a splitting smile filled his vision.
The right arm spun through the air while still holding his Repliglass Blood-Sign.
And *she* spoke as if whispering to him by his pillow.
"Did you think I couldn't possibly be a living thing if my head came off?"
That lookalike was identical to the White Queen.
When he had first encountered her, the resemblance had been so perfect it had made his skin crawl.
"Did you think that surely – surely! – I wouldn't open up my own chest and replace my organs with artificial ones just to play with you for a bit?"
Time was not infinite.
With far too light a sound, the severed arm landed fist-first on the ship's deck.
There was only one possible answer.
Meinokawa Aoi, the vessel contracted with Kyousuke, put on a horrifyingly twisted smile and announced it for him.
"Fwa ha ha!! But you had to have known dismantling my body isn't enough to kill me! Right, brother?"

Part 11

It was a simple matter.
An extremely simple matter.
The double blonde braid girl's face lit up and she leaned forward. She showed no concern for the slender bodylines visible through her school swimsuit or the small butt visible below her miniskirt and pareo.
"Oh, Queen! You finally decided to reveal it?"
"That's right! I was actually the White Queen☆ Tah dah! Sigh, so I can finally talk like normal again. That was partially to get in character as that piece of junk, but I was also concerned some small idiosyncrasy would clue you in."
The demon dressed as a shrine maiden giggled at the girl's idolizing voice, smiled at her like she was her beloved daughter, and raised her index finger.
What was it Olivia had said with that light pink rose decoration on her chest?
"Boo. If you were always like this, you wouldn't have to fight with the White Queen."
What had she been looking at when she said that?

What had she felt while watching those two approaching and relying on each other?
“It is true Bridesmaid’s fortress was laid out exactly like a temple to summon me. …But *that doesn’t mean it was used to summon me.*”
The shrine maiden devil’s tone was light as she worked at her long hair. She gathered it on either side and formed those lovely twintails.
It made sense that the reproduction had been so spot-on.
It had actually been her.
“I was summoned earlier than that. And I traded places with that ornament named Meinokawa Aoi.”
“…!!”
“Oh, dear. Your face is so very pale. But please don’t faint. One of my objectives here was to set up an environment in which you must rely on me, brother. That was the entire purpose of Bridesmaid’s attack and the infected Queens. The only way out of this is to rely on the new Unexplored-class you constructed and I have placed myself by your side as the one-and-only special vessel capable of summoning it. Heh heh. You need my help to kill me; isn’t that such a wonderfully twisted setup?”
Sweat poured down Kyousuke’s body and he staggered to the side.
But more than fear or pain, it was doubt in his gaze.
The shrine maiden Queen picked up on that and answered with a know-it-all look on her face.
“You want to know if a Material like me can really function as a vessel? Hee hee hee. Have you forgotten, brother!? The Yellow Gills is merely one of the Three and thus ranked below me, but she once reigned as the strongest Freedom summoner under the name Perfect Equilibrium. Besides, a human changes sides after reaching Award 1000, so the distinction between us has always been rather vague. …And more importantly, I can throw out all of those rules if I want. *There is nothing I can’t do*. Right, brother?”
Every time they grew further cornered and the density of despair grew, Kyousuke was forced to rely on a grand technique for an immediate reversal. And unbeknownst to him, the White Queen had set it up that way so he would have to rely on her more and more.
Even the presence of Doctor S, Kyousuke’s biological father who awaited him in the underside of the world, had been no more than part of the illusionist’s technique.
There was no force greater than the White Queen. So normally thinking, she would not need a summoner, no matter how skilled they might be. She had nevertheless worked with Bridesmaid because she had wanted to place an obvious enemy in the cast to keep him from focusing too much on Meinokawa Aoi.
“Nowww, I have taken away your special vessel and the dominant arm you need to use the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony in the first place.”
She giggled as a lovely smile wickedly spread across her face like it was tearing her cheeks apart.

No checkmate could be more complete.
She softly placed her hands on either side of her flushed and thoroughly melted face as a tremor ran down her spine.
“What options are left for you? Surely, surely this isn’t enough for you to raise the white flag. Yes, if you say you have no option but to surrender, it will be time for the world’s most enjoyable beatdown as I make a delicious meal out of you!!”
There was nothing he could do.
All of his trump cards had been taken from him and the cruise ship was surrounded by a swarm of infected Queens.
Any one of those strongest of the strongest possessed hopeless power and he was entirely surrounded.
There was simply no way he could win.
However, he said something else:



“I had a feeling that’s what this was.”
The ship continued to slide across the ground, but time definitely stopped. Something odd had happened.
“Everything about this had to be connected. Ever since the initial attack on the train, I was stuck with the same odd feeling that I was following some kind of preset rails. And when I ran across Olivia Highland and the rocket attack, it became clear that human willpower could ignore coincidental

phenomena…that is, as long as you had the willpower, you were guaranteed to win a lottery. So why did Bridesmaid set that up and what were they hoping to have me complete using my willpower? The answer was obvious: they were supporting the construction of Meinokawa Aoi. And at the same time, Bridesmaid only ever thinks about one thing: the White Queen. That meant they had constructed this coincidence-altering world in accordance with the Queen's will. So *turning Meinokawa Aoi into a special vessel* and manipulating coincidence to gather the necessary pieces were the Queen's objectives that those worshipers were carrying out for her. What other conclusion could I reach?"
His supposedly severed right arm grew out of his sleeve.
No…
"Brother, you mean…?"
"I knew this would happen, so I had *a different arm* in my sleeve. You already know what it was you tore off, don't you? I have to admit, the Joruri Method really is well made. I mean, it fooled you."
Kyousuke's expression remained unchanged.
It did not change even in front of the White Queen.
Also, an Incense Grenade was only useful if it detonated while viewing the target with the naked eye. Then what target had Kyousuke been viewing?
"I'll admit I kept the information on my trump cards relatively hidden. And that left you feeling nervous and uneasy, didn't it?"
"Brother, I know this won't accomplish anything, but I suppose I will still ask: when did you figure it out…?"
"This is nothing worth praising me over. I was of two minds on this the entire time. I kept thinking 'surely not' and 'it couldn't be'. First of all, you maintained your memories of me even before the contract. Like when you moved out of sight to change. But I still had my doubts: could that be because she's a Joruri Method? So just to be sure, I kept the crucial information hidden while hoping beyond hope that it wasn't true. *My heart is still weak*. …But the first time I clearly questioned it was probably when you were playing with those kids in the river."
"Playing…in the river?"
"You made a water gun with your hands, remember? There are a lot of regional variations, so you can tell where someone learned their technique. Hey, Queen, wasn't that *the method I taught you* back in the Miniature Garden? At the Pool of Tears."
"Tch!!"
"And even if you have taken the position of Meinokawa Aoi, it isn't over yet. That doesn't actually eliminate the Unexplored-class designed for use against you. This isn't a problem as long as I can acquire a replacement vessel. Meaning…"
He held something in his regrown right hand…no, in the real one hidden inside his clothing.

It was a glass container about the size of a relay baton. It was filled with a beautiful red liquid that could be mistaken for a melted ruby.
That was the Jewel Blood.
“This all changes if I can make another one. What we needed here was to locate the permanently-summoned Queen that acts as a core for the infected Queens. We needed to find that one out of a group of ten or twenty thousand. While, of course, maintaining an environment in which we could supply a finishing blow using our new Material.”
There was an odd sound much like the breaking of a thin metal blade.
There was no visible phenomenon.
But that sound indicated that Kyousuke had broken his contract with Meinokawa Aoi…no, with the White Queen.
And even after casting her aside, he still had a vessel girl by his side: Olivia Highland.
All destiny in this world was under the White Queen’s control. But Shiroyama Kyousuke’s willpower had still managed to gather that crystallization of an old, old bond.
His odds of victory were not zero.
So he spoke.
“Thanks, Queen. It really helped that you were even dumber than I had imagined.”

Secret Document Concerning Kingdom F 03

Where does the F in Kingdom F come from?
Where is Kingdom F located in Eastern Europe?
In what year was Kingdom F founded?

Surprisingly, the residents of Kingdom F are mostly unaware that the answers to those questions are not common knowledge.
Now, can you answer them?
Entire kingdoms are often viewed that way when there is an ocean between you and them. If it is not a superpower like America or Russia, then even if it is helping move the complexly intertwined gears of the world, not many people can keep track of exactly what gears are connected to their everyday lives. In fact, if you can do that, you should start calling yourself an economic analyst and try your hand at stock and futures trading.
There is nothing to feel ashamed about.
It is only natural you know nothing about Kingdom F.
That is the normal reaction.

But of course, there is a reason why information on Kingdom F does not get out. Unlike the past, the world has grown smaller. At this point, there is little you cannot investigate if you feel like it. So if there was no reason for it, it would be strange for no focus to fall on Kingdom F. A major search engine has launched countless communication satellites and a major online shopping site is attempting to reach every corner of the planet with drones. If there is an unnaturally empty field in the records of this highly digitized society, there must be a reason for it.
Then what is that reason?
Surprisingly, the answer is something else the residents of Kingdom F do not know.

Facts

- Doctor S is Kyousuke's biological father, but there are questions concerning his past. It is possible he was researching a way of stably producing Kyousuke-level summoners in a normal household environment. It also seems Kyousuke had a mother and *little sister*, but he cannot recall any information on them as if their faces are blotted out.
- Doctors S is motivated not by curiosity but by his desire to conquer his fear by thoroughly investigating the structure and mysteries of the White Queen. It is much like the desire to safely enjoy the greatest thrill ride.
- To maintain a stable supply of rare vessels, Doctor S has increased the denominator. He is currently experimenting in raising a large number of Joro spiders and cross-breeding the most talented ones. If he can consistently eliminate the below average or average ones, he will consider it a success.
- Kyousuke and Biondetta had completed the anti-White Queen Unexplored-class before arriving in Houbi Village. Kyousuke's request to Lu Niang Lan was to dispose of the biolab he had used for that.
- Meinokawa Aoi was the actual White Queen, not just a lookalike. The Queen was trying to place herself as the one-and-only countermeasure so that she could eliminate that method.
- High-level Materials can mimic both summoners and vessels.
- Kyousuke was aware of this risk and secretly created a false hand and some artificial blood to fool her.

- It is not over yet. Olivia holds the key to the conflict between Kyousuke and the Queen.

Notes and References

1. ↑ A type of traditional Japanese sandal with sole made of straw.
2. ↑ A type of traditional Japanese socks, worn with *zori*.

Stage 04: The Blossoming White Flower Shines Even in the Moonlight

“Ah.”
“The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee).”

(Stage 04 Open 07/20 22:10)
The Blossoming White Flower Shines Even in the Moonlight

Part 1

Something happened as soon as he made his declaration of war.
An incredible impact tossed around Kyousuke, Biondetta, and Olivia on the deck. Needless to say, this was the result of the ship crashing into a large boulder and coming to a stop after breaking through so many tents. The great power of inertia took them and flung them forward like artillery shells.
But that was for the best.
At the exact same moment, the White Queens rushed in from all directions and their hands tore at the empty air of the spot Kyousuke had just vacated.
The Queens’ great power worked against her here. They had continued like normal despite the impact from the collision, so they failed to reach their prey.
“Tch!! How much of this did you calculate out!?”
“Would you laugh if I said ‘all of it’?”
Kyousuke used his real right hand to grab the Repliglass Blood-Sign held by the flying fake hand and he caught Olivia’s small body as she flipped around like a thrown cat. He then jumped off of the ship with Biondetta. The deck was a few meters above the ground, so they curled up to negate the shock and bounced like balls a few times to gain more distance.
“…”
“…”
“…”
The many White Queens looked down at them from the deck.
If that group of glowing eyes attacked right away, the mere humans of Kyousuke’s group would have been erased from the world like bread crumbs tossed into a flock of birds.
So he did not hesitate.
“Biondetta!!”

“Yes, sir.”
With those words, she mercilessly detonated the ship.
A great quantity of wood flew skyward like a volcanic eruption and the waitress demon’s long hair and miniskirt fluttered. But the White Queen was not about to be killed by normal explosives. Kyousuke and Biondetta had other plans.
“Will that confuse things a little?”
“It’s pretty unusual for anyone to stand before her without using an Artificial Sacred Ground or Blood-Sign. Unstable situations tend to drift toward stable ones. Just like metals rust when oxidized. She’s trapped in a cage, at least temporarily.”
The various dried herbs, powdered minerals, and other ingredients of traditional incenses were mixed based on an individual summoner’s personal data when creating their Incense Grenades. An appropriately powerful explosion scattered those ingredients across the area to mark out that space and instantly construct an Artificial Sacred Ground.
Unlike Kyousuke, Biondetta made her own and she had stuffed all of her ingredients inside the ship before detonating it. It did not produce an Artificial Sacred Ground because the ingredients had not been mixed at Biondetta’s personal ratio, but it had still scattered an incense. And since the White Queens were being forcibly summoned without using incense, they would fall into any incense-filled area against their own wishes. It was like taking a linear motor train that was forcibly lifted up by the repulsion of electromagnets and cutting off the power so it fell to the ground.
Of course, this would not last forever.
They only had a few minutes at most.
But at times, that short a period of time could change history.
Here, he did not use a simple nickname and allow the emotion contained therein to muddy his words.
“Olivia.”
“No.”
Small hands pushed back against his chest.
The double blonde braid girl puffed out her soft-looking cheeks and kicked around the slender, sandal-wearing legs extending from her ridiculously short skirt and floral pattern pareo.
“If you want to fight, do it on your own. I won’t take your side, Onii-chan. I would help you if I thought this would bring you two together, but you’re seriously trying to kill her.”
“I have a question for you, Olivia: Why do you trust the White Queen so much?”
“Because! That’s what everyone says!!”
“Everyone?”
“Everyone in my kingdom!! She’s been our kingdom’s goddess forever and they say she’s appeared over and over in our time of need and ended the conflicts! That’s how everyone has ruled the kingdom: my mom, my mom’s

mom, and my mom's mom's mom!!" Olivia shouted at him while pouting her lips below her straw hat. "There's something wrong with you, Onii-chan! If you worked with the White Queen, you'd be the strongest duo ever. Isn't that how it was when you saved my kingdom from civil war!? She reigned supreme from atop a mountain of rubble and subjugated everyone who stood before her!! What's wrong with that? When there's such an obvious solution right there, it's wrong to increase the damage done by going out of your way to avoid it!!"
That may have been how it looked from Olivia's point of view.
There may have been no way to overturn the weight of legends built up over centuries – and perhaps more than a millennium. The words of a boy who had only lived about a decade and a half may not have been enough to match those long-told myths.
But.
It was time to double check the base assumptions.
"Olivia, that doesn't make sense."
"What doesn't!? Anyone can tell the White Queen is the strongest, she's obedient when she's with you, and she can leave everyone with a smile if she uses her power! If you weren't so touchy, we could solve everything!!"
"I wasn't talking about that." Kyousuke sighed. And he said, "It doesn't make sense for the White Queen to have been helping your kingdom in the same way throughout its history."

Part 2

Preposterous theories had been whispered for quite some time.
What was the White Queen?
Was she the highest being who had existed since ancient times and helped to create the world? Or had she been created in the distant future but the past had been remade the instant she was created?
"Do you remember what Doctor S, my father, said?"
"What…did he say?"
"When his greatest desire was fulfilled in July of 1999, he saw the future."
"What…are…?"
"Also, the Wicked Green Woman of the Unexplored-class Three said that the Unexplored-class are each in charge of one portion of the other world's laws and that, by gathering all of those together, they can suppress all of the White Queen's power. Although the White Queen turned out to be too powerful so all of the Unexplored-class were dragged around by her while still chained to her. …However the White Queen came to be, the current conditions were only completed partway through. Since the parameters are different than they were in the distant past, the current method would fail

to summon her several centuries ago. That means the White Queen couldn't have appeared a long, long time ago using the same methods as today."
So…
"Let's say there was a way of summoning the White Queen in the distant past that didn't use the Third Summoning Ceremony or Blood-Sign and let's say Kingdom F accurately passed down that method throughout the ages. That method should have stopped working from the moment the rest of the Unexplored-class was defeated. But since that hasn't happened, it means your legends were wrong. It went the other way. Instead of using the past to build up to the future, the future was referenced to rewrite the past."
"What are you talking about, Onii-chan!? You're the one that isn't making any sense!" Olivia shook her head with the decorative collar and pareo worn over her school swimsuit. "I mean…I mean…I mean there are statues of the White Queen in my kingdom. There are tons of paintings and old stories, so she couldn't have just appeared recently!!"
"…"
"And what about Meinokawa Aoi here!? Sure, she was replaced, but the original one was a lookalike of the Queen and she'd been here for hundreds of years, right!? They would need someone to model her after, so it only makes sense if the White Queen has been loved by the world and answering people's prayers for long, long, long, long time, right!?"
The answer to that was obvious.
So Kyousuke gave it.
"And how did that work without Blood-Signs or Incense Grenades?"
"!?"
They had seen the Meinokawa Shrine and Sekurtiti.
There were organizations that had existed long before that discovery. They had probably contacted the Divine-class. But what about the Unexplored-class? You could not find any mention of them in any ancient text.
The evidence did not make it correct.
The evidence was a problem.
It was like finding a barcode on the back of a hundred-year-old book.
…But the explanation was simple.
They might have had a method of accessing the Divine-class which contained the gods of existing religions. But what about the Unexplored-class above that? Were there past legends of them? The answer was no.
They had only been discovered along with the Third Summoning Ceremony in July of 1999. Before then, how could it have been possible to access them with enough accuracy to get a clear picture of the White Queen?
And would such a method still work unchanged after July of 1999?
Even if they had existed in ancient times, they would have remained in the other world without being summoned.
They might have broken the rules, broken through the barrier between worlds, and appeared in this world when they felt like it, but there had been no way for humans to intentionally summon them.

Wasn’t that the most natural assumption?
“B-but, um, th-there are still a lot of people trying to summon the White Queen with twisted methods!!”
“Those simply dismantle the completed Blood-Sign method and reconstruct it to fit their own ceremony. It’s a lot like repackaging gasoline to create a Molotov cocktail. They haven’t created anything of their own.”
If it had been that simple, the Blood-Sign method would not have become so ubiquitous. If everyone could skip three steps to reach the White Queen with some random method they thought up, no one would bother with the rules.
The Blood-Sign method was the starting point for it all.
That was why humanity could not rid itself of those 150cm sticks.
“That’s not true! That can’t be true!! I mean, my kingdom has always had the White Queen and we prospered because she lent us her power!!”
“Olivia.” Kyousuke shook his head. “Do you know what the F in Kingdom F stands for?”
“Hm? What are you talking about? That’s obviously…”
With the decorative collar and pareo worn over her school swimsuit, Olivia’s tongue came to a stop.
The double blonde braid girl’s eyes widened and she froze as if paralyzed.
“A-ahh. Huh? But that’s such an obvious thing… We say it on a daily basis…”
“This is the normal way of things in foreign Houbi Village so far from Kingdom F. You could say there’s a kind of ‘atmosphere’ that doesn’t exist here. And that means there’s a chance of breaking your curse here.”
“I don’t want that!! Give back…give back my answer, Onii-chan!”
“The answer is the Flanguild Permanently Neutral Kingdom. It’s an absolute monarchy with a long history reaching as far back as 600 CE and, instead of an officially registered military, it responds to emergencies by openly using a conscripted militia and secretly sending in summoners and vessels taken from the Royal Shadows and the knights.”
“Th-that’s right, that’s right! Then what’s the prob-…”
“But, Olivia, if anyone but the two of us heard this answer, they’d probably just tilt their heads. *Is that really right?* they’d ask. *Does that kingdom really exist?* Spin the globe and you won’t find it. Search on a map app and you’ll get zero results. Can a kingdom like that really exist in this day and age?”
“A…awa…awawawawa…”
“Since the White Queen has worked her way into the very foundation of the kingdom, Kingdom F’s existence is far too unstable. So its appearance seems to waver when viewed from outside. The civil war I fought in was the same. A lot of theories were whispered here and there, but the truth is simple. Some of the people questioned it and some held no doubt whatsoever. Those conflicting values came to a head and led to a clash. The

Queen was the source of it all. After those sparks set things ablaze, it was all erased in a great conflagration. That's all there is to it."
"What's your point…?" asked straw hat Olivia with a tremor in her voice. It sounded like she was begging him to tell her it was not true. "No matter what you say, Onii-chan, the White Queen has left her mark all over the world. What's your point!?"
"That's obvious," he immediately answered. "That plain and simple history does not exist. We need to assume both the past and future were overwritten when the White Queen defeated all of the Unexplored-class and rewrote the rules."
Centuries of tradition and legends older than a millennium meant nothing to that great evil. That ultimate distortion was far greater than a black hole and she would alter everything just by being there. Who could say that her influence did not reach time and space as well? Who could claim that those remained absolute sanctuaries?
Plus, the Unexplored-class were anthropomorphized versions of the other world's rules and the White Queen had destroyed them all and was dragging them around with her. How could anyone calmly assume that had no effect on history? It made no sense to assume that was a safe zone. In fact, the only sensible conclusion was that everything visible had been thrown out of order in that moment.
Take the Rainy Girl incident for example.
That proved the White Queen was not affected by changes to history and causality.
It was a simple matter. The distortion spread outward from the Queen like ripples, so no matter what happened, it would never change the center point where she stood. The central axis of the spinning top was the most stable point. One theory said the universe was infinitely expanding due to the Big Bang, but how true was that now? Even if it had been correct at one point, *a second explosion, this one spiritual in nature,* had occurred at some point. So the center point of the expansion had to be where she stood.
"You…"
A nearly empty look came over Olivia's eyes.
No, the unnatural part was the nonexistent thing that had filled those eyes before.
"You have no way of proving that…"
"It's the opposite, Olivia."
Kyousuke calmly corrected her.
But he was far from gentle.
"I've already pointed out a contradiction. If you want to prove something, Olivia, it's your turn to prove that the White Queen has been appearing in the same way ever since the distant past. If you can't answer my question, then our discussion is over. *That will mean your kingdom's story of salvation was wrong.*"
"A-awawa."

“So what will you do, Olivia? Are you all out of arguments?”
“Awawawawa…!! But…that…doesn’t make sense. I mean, what about my mom? Or my mom’s mom? Or my mom’s mom’s mom!? You’re denying everything they did and I…I just can’t-…!!”
“No, Olivia.” Kyousuke shook his head. “Since you exist here, that long, long history must have existed. Your kingdom overcame its crises without any help from the White Queen. She came in and stole the credit for all the work your people did. You had worked up an impressive score even if you didn’t take the shortest route, but the White Queen used her cheats to take it all away. She erased all the proper records!! Just like dumping some doping drugs in an Olympic gold medalist’s test sample to get them disqualified after the fact!! We can’t let her get away with that. Everyone settled things with good, old-fashioned hard work, so we can’t let her distort the results as she sees fit using those modified test results! Or am I wrong!?”
“But…my mom…”
“It’s true you might have gained an advantage if you had been able to access the White Queen. That’s the world we live in now, after all.”
He would not let her question it.
He had already given the answer.
“But if they resolved all those problems on their own without using the White Queen, that’s an even more impressive accomplishment. Your mom wasn’t amazing because she could access the White Queen! It was your mom herself that should have received that praise! It wasn’t statues of the White Queen that should have been erected in the city squares! It was statues of your mother herself!! Who needs miracles!? Hard work is what’s truly necessary!! Why haven’t you noticed how much has been taken from you? Why can’t you tell that your desire to be on the winning side has let her continue to take everything away from you!?”
“…”
“It’s time you realized you were a victim!! You haven’t won anything and you haven’t achieved true victory even once!! So escape this life of failure. Stop smiling happily while oblivious to everything you’ve lost! If all of you stop offering your family’s glory to the Queen, take it all back with the power she’s been extracting from you, and plant your own two feet on the ground, you’ll naturally rise up together, won’t you!?”
“……
……”
Straw hat Olivia gasped.
And that small girl had to have realized that there was something strange about the White Queen.
“Say it, Olivia.”
Kyousuke was acting like a beast at this point.
No matter how coolheaded he was, he could not contain himself here.
The boy’s original driving force was an exposed and primal humanity.

“If you want to save your family!! And if you want to free your beloved kingdom from a millennium of bondage, then say it!! Everything you need to do that is gathered here. Let’s show the White Queen what human hard work can do! So say it!! *You know what kind of person I am, don’t you*!?”
It was like a repeat of the past.
It was just like the cry that girl had heard in that hellish world covered in rubble and ash as a vortex of malice pressed in from every direction and dragged her down into the depths of despair.
“…I…”
And.
Finally.
“I wouldn’t like it either if that was true!! Then what did I believe in all this time? No, what did my mom and grandma and so on rely on for so long!? That’s what this would mean!!”
She knew what had been lost.
She thought of what had been stolen.
Olivia Highland had finally regained her humanity.
“My kingdom was split in two back then. But everyone was risking their lives for what they believed in. That’s what it was supposed to be! But if both the enemies and the allies were being manipulated by the White Queen and she wouldn’t have batted an eye whether we won or lost, then how can I forgive her!? And not just that. That wasn’t the only war! If things just like that…no, even worse than that *are happening somewhere in the world every single time* and I just haven’t been able to see it, then we would have to stop that!! I understand that much!!”
But.
However.
“I can’t… I don’t have the right…”
It was like looking up at the moonlight from the bottom of a dark, dark well.
The girl crumpled up her lovely face as she spoke.
“I can’t say that after everything…!!”
“You can.”
This was another side of people.
But Kyousuke discarded it.
Did someone seeking help need to be pure and unsullied? Did they have to fit all the obvious qualities of a “weak” person? The answer was no. In fact, the people who found themselves completely cornered tended to be in extremely complex situations that could not be judged on a simple good or evil basis.
He had decided to help them regardless.
He had decided he was in no position to judge whether a specific person needed help.
So.
In that case.

“This isn’t something you need a ‘right’ to or any kind of ‘qualification’ for. I don’t care how shamelessly you’ve changed your ways. Listen, Olivia. If anything about you catches my attention and your path seems at all odd to me, that’s enough for me to take your side. If you’re being swallowed up by a great current and you’re flailing your hand around in search of something to grab onto, I will grab that hand. So *what happened before this* doesn’t matter!! Don’t let the self-made ghosts of your past hold you back!! Stay true to *what you want to be from now on*, Olivia!!!!!!”
Remove all the stops.
Forget about the hurdles.
Those things aren’t good or benevolent. If anything in your heart is holding you back from salvation, don’t call it self-sacrifice. Those things are no more than obstacles to your true desire.
The inability to resolve your own problems might hurt your pride.
Seeking out someone else’s help might be embarrassing.
But overcome it.

True salvation lies beyond that false sense of righteousness. If salvation without a struggle seems wrong, then think of the shattering of those chains as your first and last penance.
“…me.”
So.
So.
So!!

“Help me, Onii-chan…!!”
He had received her resolve.
And the boy once more rebooted Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit.
A collection of combat instincts responded.
“As you wish.”

Part 3

“I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering ‘Yellow’ Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things.”
This was a ceremony.
He cut his index finger and placed the drop of blood in the girl’s mouth.
The process was necessary to bind the summoner and vessel together.
“You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world.”
Something had felt off when he had done this with Meinokawa Aoi…no, with the pure white who was disguised as the Joruri Method, but this may have been the reason why.
It had not been a technical problem because his partner had been artificial or the most evil Unexplored-class.
The White Queen had not been seeking salvation.
So.
“So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!”
That was different now.
Kyousuke finally grabbed the hand of a girl who was thrashing about in the sticky waters as she sought salvation.
The rusty flavor bound them together.
This time, the boy had acquired the strongest bond.
“Nn…hh!”
“Olivia, bear with it a little.”
He placed his arms around the small girl’s back and his hand held a cylindrical glass container with a jewel-like red liquid inside. Kyousuke used his thumb to reveal a thick needle. It was obvious what he was going to do.
From the back.
And deep enough to directly reach her heart.
The piercing needle injected the Jewel Blood.
The girl tensed up in his arms and he slowly removed the needle.

“Let’s do this, Olivia.”
“Right.”
“Let’s settle things with the Queen once and for all!!”

Part 4

The shrine maiden White Queen thought back on what had happened.
This had all begun when she grew somewhat jealous of the powerful bond between summoner and vessel and decided to try out that path herself. But Shiroyama Kyousuke had only ever referred to her by the full name of “Meinokawa Aoi”. As if he were drawing out a clear boundary and maintaining an impersonal distance. And even though they had the relationship of summoner and vessel, it felt like the boy had always been more concerned about his reunion with Olivia Highland.
Was the Queen simply the Queen?
Could she not be anyone else?
For better or for worse?
(The problem may have been me wearing something other than white. Well, I’ll score this at about 50 points. Even if it deserves great praise for producing brother, I have a bad habit of expecting too much of this world.)
Even if they were the countless infected, each of them had fully identical specs which they used to break through the temporary barrier.
(That said, earning a passing grade is not all that bad. I wouldn’t mind tearing this to shreds!!)
*Crack, crack, crack,

what he summoned – yes, even if he relied on the Black Maw that was identical to the Queen – this group of Queens could not possibly lose.
Or so it should have been.
However.
“Ah.”
That odd syllable escaped the shrine maiden White Queen.

The Queen was also the strongest and unmatched when it came to brainpower and she possessed an all-knowing and all-powerful form, but not even she recognized the scene unfolding before her eyes. But that was only natural since a previously nonexistent being was being forcibly embedded in the world.
She had a transparent body that seemed to reject an affiliation with any and all colors and light pulsated in the center of her chest.
Her long, wavy hair fell to her hips and her long bangs covered her eyes.
She was such a small girl that her skeleton did not look fully developed.
Her heavily-equipped lower body swelled out with what looked like a skirt made of machines, which clashed harshly with the slender upper body of a lovely young maiden.
She was an incarnation of destruction with all forms of death – disaster, wild beasts, disease, execution, war, etc. – contained in the twelve giant books floating behind her like a halo.
More importantly, she was the counter-enemy embedded in the other world for the sole purpose of killing the White Queen.
“The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee).”
The boy’s lips uttered death.
Sound Range: None. Cost: 21.
The difference in numbers was meaningless. The time had come to reveal the abilities that made her the Queen’s nemesis.

Part 5

“Hee…hee hee.”
The silver twintail girl breathed fierce laughter in her mouth.
Her shrine maiden outfit immediately burst from within.
This revealed her own clothing: a wedding dress elegantly cut down to size with silver armor attached in places.
She no longer had to play the part.
So it was time to show what she could do. Her combat clothing wriggled.
The white ribbons transformed into countless swords, spears, axes, and staffs which all rushed in toward the Colorless Little Girl.
The Sword of Truth simply revealed the truth that the Queen was the strongest.
“Interesting! Yes, very interesting indeed!! Brother, let’s test this out, shall we? You built this for use against me, but just how well do you really understand the fear I bring!? It’s time for the super-hard lovey-dovey quiz show where overlooking a single fact means instant death!!”
<…>

The Little Girl, whose hair rose like cat ears on the back of her head, said nothing.
The small girl moved her right hand while maintaining a position from which she could protect Kyousuke. Bookmarks as sharp as blades and as thin as bug wings spread out in her hand like a fan. Without even looking back, she tossed them like throwing knives. They flew accurately toward the twelve giant books floating behind her like a halo and the leather-bound books opened like great maws. They devoured the bookmarks. And something was expelled from between the thick pages as if the result of some kind of equivalent exchange.
The Queen's swords were melted with bubbling acid.
The Queen's spears were crushed between giant gears.
The Queen's axes were swarmed by flying insects.
The Queen's staffs were knocked down by aerial bombs.
They all fit perfectly like plugs fitting into the corresponding sockets, so the White Queen's violent rush of attacks was consumed and eliminated in midair.
In that instant, the Queen understood.
Those books were apocalypse encyclopedias. Each page contained enough power to bring ruin to the world, so the Little Girl could freely choose among and release any demise – yes, including purely fictional ones that the world had yet to experience.
This was different again from the Wicked Green Women of the Unexplored-class Three.
The Wicked Green Woman's "children" would twist and rot the existing world through the eruption of new forms of malice, such as never-before-seen drugs or special scams, but each and every one of this small girl's attacks could cleanly blow away the entire world.
She could wipe clean the very world in which the Queen was strongest.
"So…"
The White Queen continued smiling and gently brought her hands together in front of her chest.
Her entire body glowed.
"So what!?"
She once more focused on the divinity infinitely overflowing from her beautiful body, which increased its output. It was like a massive beam weapon that fired in every direction like a planetarium surrounding that pure white. The incredible heat could punch through gods and devils by the dozens. The weapons were merely for decoration. The Queen herself was the greatest and strongest trump card. This attack would teach the unbelievers that simple fact.
But the Colorless Little Girl simply took a single step to the side.
The pure white explosion of light shot through and tore away space itself where her target had been a moment earlier.
Had the Little Girl been afraid to block it?

Had she only just barely managed dodge it in time?
No.
“?”
Something had seemed slightly off even though the White Queen had never seen her before, but that may have come from the Queen’s sixth sense or inspiration that far surpassed enlightenment or divine visions.
She swung her head to the side before she could verbalize it in her mind.
Yes.
Even the White Queen had taken evasive action on instinct.
A moment later, an even more brutal white light shot out from the Colorless Little Girl as if to return the favor.
The cat-like hair on the back of her head shook and the girl had drawn a transparent sword from among the many weapons surrounding her hips like a long skirt. Even as she just barely dodged, she had intentionally exposed that blade to the Queen’s attack and stored up the great power like charging it with static electricity.
Then the Colorless Little Girl added her own power on top of that, swung the infinitely-growing blade of light as if making a grand slam, and returned the even more brutal attack.
The White Queen’s cheek tingled.
Something remained where her head had been a moment before: a white afterimage. Only she should have been able to destroy the structure of both worlds at once like that, but the Colorless Little Girl had reached that point.
“Tch. Are you going to call this the beauty of a scratch, brother!?”
A few silver hairs floated through the air.
That was all, but it held great meaning.
The Queen was no longer absolute.
She had been placed on the chopping block where life and death were both options.
“!?”
And she did not have time to be surprised.
With far too light a sound, a dark red hole opened in the White Queen’s palm. It was red. The twintail girl’s temple twitched eerily, but more due to the introduction of a color other than white than due to the pain.
The gunshots were only heard after the fact.
A few of the heavy firearms from the weapon skirt had pointed forward and produced a storm of blinding light and deafening noise.
There was no mysticism or allure here. It was simply raw firepower. The violent act seemed to transform the very concept of disillusionment and disappointment and fire it as a weapon. Of course, they could not possibly be using mere hunks of lead. Each time one of them broke through the White Queen’s soft skin and entered her flesh, it would change its form and volume inside her to create giant swords, spears, axes, and staffs.
Again and again, she was skewered from within and ripped apart.

At this point, there was nothing but red. She had been shredded until not a hint of her pure white remained.
But the White Queen’s expression was still confident.
Immediately afterwards, the twintail girl’s badly injured body burst from within. But not from one of the Colorless Little Girl’s attacks. The burst flesh and blood hung in midair and seemed to follow the path of invisible fingertips as it formed the letters of a complex magic circle. Finally, a white light filled the red blood.
The three-dimensional magic circle was torn apart as the White Queen herself appeared with her previous bright skin restored.
“The ceremony of regeneration following self-sacrifice. The consumption and production of souls may not seem to fit together at first glance, but even a worthless world will be reborn after its demise. Why would I be unable to do the same?”
She extended her slender arms and stared at her bare shoulders and upper arms like she was checking the results of a beauty salon.
“I almost never use that ability since it’s hard to imagine anything that could harm me, so I was somewhat concerned I had grown a little rusty, but it seems there was nothing to worry about.”
That snake-like infinity allowed her to continually shed her skin as if removing a veil. No matter how much her flesh was harmed, she could reveal the brand new skin below it.
“Now, even if you analyze the string of letters and try to prevent me from constructing the circle, keep in mind that that is but one of my forms. Will the ten-minute Artificial Sacred Ground really be long enough to eliminate all 512 forms?”
<Interfering with theory of relativity, semi-infinitely extending timeline. Ten minutes has been redefined to an unmeasurable unit.>
“Tch!!”
The White Queen clicked her tongue, but not because the basic conditions had been so easily overturned before her eyes. The White Queen herself could extend time as easily as saying hi. Besides, extending the effective time would not change anything. The Queen simply had to use her power to slaughter this insolent challenger.
The silver twintail girl was slightly irritated because-

- The “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth. Notation: iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz.
- Unexplored-class. Sound Range: None. Cost: 21.
- Identical to the Black Maw.
- Method of Killing: None. (Estimated to be a serious error in the Unexplored-class which are the rules of the 3rd.)
- Securing center point of all phenomena due to the spiritual Big Bang of the 3rd’s establishment. Negating interference due to time reversal and causal change. Fully erasing frozen standby time after executing each command.
- Rare☆ x1056 (Rank: Only Rare).
- HP: 2,690,227,504. MANA: 3,199,078,539. STR: 891,103,755. VIT: 709,925,590. INT: 90,386,619. MIN: 728,014,029. AGI: 998,799,899. LUK: 877,759,011.
- Best Range: Long, Mid, Short, Throw, Counter. Worst Range: None.
- Full resistance to: Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Lightning, Light, Dark, and Physical. Resistance to all 48 status effects, including instant death.
- All attacks can target every enemy at once (with a range upgrade of up to 128 times) and become any element (including non-elemental).
- Warning: But all of this is calculated using her normal form. It is estimated that later form transformations will greatly change these base values using an adjustment (scale factor).
- She can freely transform between 512 different forms. In her resting form, HP, MANA, and status effects automatically recover with the passage of time. (Recovery priority order is: status effects [including instant death], HP, MANA.)
- List of self-support command skills which do not consume MANA: Ignore Target Defense, Perfect Homing, Absolute Status Effect Application, Absolute Attack Evasion, Adaption to All Environments and Weather Conditions, Right to Command the Sword of Truth (normally in equipped mode), Search for Shiroyama Kyousuke, Wide Range Enemy Search, Inspiration Power Up, Negate Attack, Scale Up Own Parameters (up to 256 times), Obstruct Malicious Observation, Inviolability Power Up, Break Parameter Growth Cap, Perfect Stability Control of Self-Produced Power, Prevent Self-Destruction from Attack Recoil,… (Read More)
- Note: Her charisma is estimated to purely come from her power and beauty, not from her skills.

- Special Condition: She will unconditionally lose her cool when Shiroyama Kyousuke is mentioned. This cannot be mitigated or negated using resistances, defenses, or skills.
- ??? (39 unanalyzed black boxes confirmed. Rerun task?)
- Illegal program detected. Use of a malicious plugin confirmed… (Read More)
- Conclusion: A collection of worthless trash. Defeat possible.

Part 5 (Cont.)

“When did you start feeling around in my guts, brother!?”
The size of the values did not matter now.
Once a fear had been analyzed and quantified, you had revealed the starting point toward conquering it.
If you had numbers, you could compare them.
You could send out someone with even greater numbers to knock them down a notch.
Normally, learning just a fragment of the White Queen’s true power would have looked like such a great precipice it would break your mind and shatter your soul, but the Colorless Little Girl was different. She confirmed each handhold, scaled the cliff wall, and greedily pursued the data needed to conquer the Queen.
And more importantly…
(Did she directly view the Facts, the settings of the Third Age that I swallowed whole when I defeated all of the Unexplored-class laws…?)
Something ran down the White Queen’s spine.
If she were human, she would have immediately recognized it.
It was fear.
(No, wait. The things in our world can’t be described with digital words like “parameters” or “scale factors”!!)
A solid sound rang out.
But not from the Colorless Little Girl. From Shiroyama Kyousuke’s Blood-Sign while he was supposedly contained within the protective circle. Yes, he was still hitting his White Thorns and knocking the scattered Petals into the Spots. He continued to build up the stock which acted as his weapon.
And yet shifting to another Material now would be entirely unnecessary.
But that was not what happened.
Even as he swapped out letters and rearranged their order, the Colorless Little Girl remained the Colorless Little Girl. Only the attack she specialized in changed as she launched them toward the White Queen.

Yes, instead of firing long-range projectiles, she held a Western double-edged sword in each hand and slashed them toward the enemy in front of her.
As soon as a portion of the White Queen's clothing became a sword and was broken, she used her fingers to scatter sparks from the Colorless Little Girl's two-sword style.
"Brother, have you advanced the age?"
"…"
"You aren't freely summoning Materials from the world's mythologies. You have completed every possible pattern and arrangement using only variations of the Colorless Little Girl, gathering all miracles and mysteries into a single point. Have you brought us to the age of the *Fourth Summoning Ceremony*!?"
He had not peeked inside her chest. He had not decoded her.
He had embedded and overwritten.
Write, not read.
In that case…
(This is bad…)
For the first time.
Probably for the first time ever, the White Queen participated in a pure exchange of blows, unlike the *defensive battle* she fought at the Queen's Miniature Garden.
(The Fourth Summoning Ceremony can't be defeated using the Third Summoning Ceremony. I may be the peak of the Third, but if he has embedded me in that framework, then I will be captured by those rules!)
She felt a scorching sensation.
The Queen had smashed the two blades with her bare hands, but in exchange, red blood dripped from her palms. This was something other than white. And despite the swords being broken, the Colorless Little Girl pummeled her with the hilts and guards.
The Queen threw everything out.
With each blow, she changed from one form to another. Entirely different forms of despair budded and blossomed into the world before being mercilessly trampled.
…At one point, an immortal Queen rejected all harm as alluring butterfly wings grew from her back and her arms became mantis-like.
<Strongest Theory: Immortality and a near-impenetrable shell. Quasi-immortality through special alteration of the body's surface by bathing in dragon blood or soaking in a river of immortality. Countermeasure: Precise sharpshooting concentrated on a single point of an exceptional non-protected part.>
…At one point, a clockwork Queen was adorned with giant gears and countless artillery weapons.
<Strongest Theory: The circle that binds the hit with the return. When using a projectile weapon with great destructive power, safety is ensured by

always returning the divine weapon to its owner after use so that it may not be stolen. Countermeasure: A single throw can only defeat the enemy being targeted, so evasion is possible by scattering decoys.>
…At one point, the Queen gained gills by her ears, flippers between her fingers and toes, and tail fins from her ankles as she crushed everything with a body far larger than the king of marine creatures.
<Strongest Theory: A giant form and proportional divinity. Divinity is seen in anything that grows large enough to reach units too large to display. Countermeasure: Increase strength to the limit and attack head-on with a special weapon.>
…At one point, a gorgeous Queen extended roots from her feet in every direction, grew giant flowers from all across her body, and burned them like torches.
<Strongest Theory: The destructive effects of flames and explosions. The deification of fire's wrath. Especially the destructive act of an extra-large fireball destroying entire cities or civilizations. Countermeasure: End the combat state by avoiding direct combat and putting her to sleep, etc.>
But you must not forget.
If she was changing from form to form, that meant each form was being destroyed in turn.
The Colorless Little Girl's hair rose up like cat ears in the back and she launched a fierce attack much like a Gatling gun. She went beyond a mere Swiss army knife. Under the guidance of Shiroyama Kyousuke's Blood-Sign, she accurately countered each of the threats.
But the White Queen noticed a certain frightening phenomenon more than she did the simple firepower.
"It's categorized…? You've taken my white light, used a prism to split it into tens of thousands of colors, and tagged each and every form of fear I bring? And now you are passing that light through colored cellophane to erase that color!?"
"People could only ever look up at that mystical light."
It was Shiroyama Kyousuke who answered.
That boy's strength was different from the White Queen's. His transformed defeat into power.
"So we've observed it over and over, for as long as we've longed for it. You were the strongest from the beginning and could gain even more than you wanted whenever you wanted it, so you might not understand the flavor of a single grain of rice. But we have long dreamed of that grain we could never reach."
Drops that resembled red jewels splattered on the ground.
Clear sweat appeared on her brow.
Heated breaths escaped her lips with an irregular rhythm.
Each of those "unthinkable" things would be unremarkable from a human, but they came from the White Queen here. She easily stirred up the world. She bent and tore space and she caused impossible phenomena. She

entirely ignored the structure of the air and boulders around her to tear them away and ball them up like scraps of paper. In the blink of an eye, they took form, filled with color, and gained individuality. One looked like a clockwork dragon covered in red rust. One looked like a cruel flying drone designed from human bones and skin. But that was not their true essence. Their balled-up gaps provided glimpses of non-matching eyeballs, fingernails, and long hair.

These were not even from the Regulation-class, Divine-class, or Unexplored-class of the other world. The Queen's power was overflowing with such great force that these soulless things crawled out with no concern for the ecosystem or mythological structure.

But it was too late.

If the full-power Queen was no match for this opponent while systematically managing her energy, could these splashes of excess energy leave any claw marks in her?

The Colorless Little Girl only needed to take a single step back to measure the distance between them.

<Command: Cooking>

A kitchen knife and frying pan had appeared in her hands at some point and they produced a storm of flashing light as they instantly transformed the threat into colorful food. The Colorless Little Girl bit off piece after piece and swallowed them like some kind of joke, but the effects were instantaneous.

<Damage recovery and MANA resupply complete. They were delic-…>

"Okay, infected Queens, all of you attack her at once!!"

Identical White Queens rushed in from all directions. They had a different origin, but their specs were no different. And Shiroyama Kyousuke had forbidden himself from killing. He could not erase the infected Queens from both worlds because that would mean killing the vessels along with them.

However…

<Damage Restriction: Non-Lethal Mode. Remaining HP set to 3.>

A giant explosion seemed to erupt outwards from the Colorless Little Girl in the center. In actuality, the countless weapons forming her skirt had all fired, the twelve giant books behind her had produced various forms of demise, and the Colorless Little Girl herself had used her small hands to grab them, tear them apart, and throw them. Altogether, a storm swept out horizontally, tore the flesh and blood of the infected Queens to pieces, and accurately reduced them to only the Silhouette that contained the vessel's mind. Those hunks of flesh had lost the majesty of the Queen and they simply pulsated on the ground before reverting to their original human forms. And yet all of the infected Queens were supposed to have specs identical to the main Queen.

This would not have been possible just by mastering physical destruction. It was a more fundamental matter.

(Is she entirely blocking off the power of my invisible role as it leaves me through invisible wires?)
This was truly the Queen’s twilight.
This absolute blade of rejection not only affected the White Queen herself but all of the influence she had on the world.
<Illegal program detected. Deleting it along with the malicious plugin.>
“Don’t use such boring words to describe me!!”
It must have been acting on its own now because one of the broken swords caught the reflected heat of the flames and stabbed down into the White Queen’s shadow that stretched across the ground.
After the Colorless Little Girl grabbed it once more and pulled it out with a sticky sound, it had grown a blade by absorbing the very color of the shadow.
That too was a portion of the Queen’s power.
Once she realized that, the Colorless Little Girl used her small hand to casually grab, crush, and toss aside the mysterious blade portion. Weapon destruction. After robbing the White Queen of her many mysterious powers, she would destroy it so it could not be recovered.
The Queen lost her other forms.
Her special skills were forcibly stripped from her.
“Then!!!!!!”
The Queen spread the fingers of her right hand and directly struck space itself.
It did not matter that she was out of range. The Queen’s attack contained the power to destroy, crush, and overwrite both worlds with nothing but white.
(All I have to do is smash this coordinate of this fragile world!!)
As cracks of light spread through space itself, the White Queen brought her hands together in front of her chest. Immediately, the entire scene was smashed inward and a great mass of pure white pressed in toward Shiroyama Kyousuke and the Colorless Little Girl. Those massive claw marks were like two giant walls. And they showed no concern for the fate of all that lay between them. That strongest compression dyed everything in its own colors, destroyed it, and brought absolute white to the world.
But.
(?)
The Queen found she could not bring her hands all the way together. A strange repulsion pushed back like there was a clump of invisible rubber between them.
And the Colorless Little Girl had her arms spread horizontally to stop the white compression. Nothing on the ground beyond that point was crushed. An incomprehensible barrier much like the protective circle had saved them. There was no point in asking where it had come from.
The only person not protected here was the White Queen.
So she could predict what the hunter would do next.

The Colorless Little Girl forcefully extended her arms to the left and right as if prying open an elevator door. The compression stopped, then it actually spread outwards, and finally the scenery that had supposedly been crushed into whiteness regained its original colors. The White Queen's arms followed suit, so an odd sound of something shattering came from her shoulders.
"Damn…you…"
The twelve books behind her nemesis's back began to glow.
If everything but her target was protected by a barrier, there was no need to hold back any longer. On top of that, the Queen's arms were broken, so she could not defend. There would never be a greater opportunity.
Shiroyama Kyousuke set up the final situation by using his Blood-Sign to enter the appropriate name…no, command. And then he leaned in toward the Colorless Little Girl's ear and whispered to her.
"*RQ Cat*, the rest is up to you."
<Yes, *Nii-sama*. As you wish.>
"Ahh!? Do you want me to obliterate you, you latecomer!!!!!"
Even her thoughts vanished from her mind.
What did her shattered shoulders matter? So what if this was a perfect game where no one else could be affected? She could always tear apart her old flesh and blood and recreate that container of flesh into a new body.
Who cares if her other forms had been taken from her and her many mysteries had been destroyed?
She could not give up that position.
That spot was hers.
"…!!"
An ominous sound came from the White Queen's shattered shoulders. The willpower in the glint of her eyes gave a clear message: *Yes, that's right. Why bother going through a full regeneration? I can just grow another five or ten arms with weapons attached.*
But.
As the White Queen seethed and boiled, she never managed to launch her next attack.
Just before she could, a quiet sound struck her sense of hearing just once. She heard it via bone conduction, so it had not come through her ears. The Colorless Little Girl's soft index finger had gently pressed against the center of the White Queen's forehead.
When had she done this? And how?
The Queen had no time to wonder that.
The "change" had already begun.
"It…can't be… Brother, is this…?"
"Yes. From the outset, the Colorless Little Girl was created for a single purpose. So all her other functions are superfluous. They were only meant to pave the way for her to directly touch you."

“Spiritual gravitational collapse… My appearance caused a spiritual Big Bang, so you prepared this ridiculous method just to gather that infinitely-expanding influence back into a single point!?”
“Killing you in this universe is impossible. So first, I have to absorb and eliminate all of the influence you have caused. All of the abnormalities you have spread around must be regathered in you, the center point. And once we are back in a proper and unchanged world, you can be eliminated with a normal sword strike.”
This was a lot like creating a super-massive black hole that would swallow up the entire infinitely-expanding universe and gather every last particle in a single place.
But that was how far you had to go if you were to defeat the White Queen. He would create the Fourth Age.
And that meant rejecting everything of the Third Age.
<Search Range: the entirety of this world and the other world. Search Target: White Queen. Comparison to bodily tissue complete.>
(I see…)
After being cornered to this extent, the final expression on the silver twintail girl’s face was, unsurprisingly, a faint smile.
“Yes, yes. If you were able to corner me so accurately and if you were able to seal off and strike down every last one of my cards without missing a single one…”
<Final check complete. Nii-sama, I will now begin.>
“…It just shows how deeply you understand me. Right, brother?”
“…”
“You don’t need to say anything at this point. If that is what this means, then I suppose it’s not that ba-…”
<Commencing execution. Once the White Queen has been absorbed from the entire world and gathered in this single point, I will cut her down and throw her out.>

Part 6

“Ah.”
Once it was all over, Shiroyama Kyousuke released a silly-sounding voice.
It seemed too easy.
Laws that surpassed all laws were the same as an ordered string of code.
He had simply displayed the proper “answer” to the world.
He may not have believed it himself. His belief in that illusion of the strongest being may have been even stronger than he had thought. He was unsure how to accept this sudden “ending”.
Was it over now?

Could he really relax?
He could not remove the tension in his body. He seemed to be waiting for something to happen.
No.
It was more like there was an empty hole in his heart…?
But while that happened, the Chain period began, the full 90 seconds passed, and the Artificial Sacred Ground itself vanished. The vessel that had become a highly irregular Unexplored-class returned to being a slender girl with two blonde braids.
The paranormal had left.
“Onii-chan, is it…over now?”
Olivia Highland had to question it too.
Kyousuke did not know how to respond to the girl looking worriedly up at him or to Biondetta who stood by his side.
And…
“Hello, hello. So it’s finally over, is it?”
They heard a muffled voice.
They looked over and saw a man in a lab coat and riding suit. He wielded a Blood-Sign sword and a giant spider vessel crawled across his body.
“You seem surprisingly calm for someone whose target of worship was just annihilated.”
“That’s because I continued my research out of phobia, not philia.” His tone was casual. “I want to approach as close as possible to the greatest fear possible and experience it as much as possible with as much safety as possible. But, well, you can have too much of a good thing. Since I couldn’t guarantee my safety no matter what, I couldn’t transform that danger into an attraction. It was probably best to get rid of it. She could be resurrected at any time since the conditions for killing her are still an unknown, but this should end it for the time being anyway.”
“…”
“Don’t give me that look. I was supporting you in a number of ways. Hey, Kyousuke, if the White Queen had immediately obeyed her desire and driven a hand through your back while disguised as Meinokawa Aoi, it would’ve all been over before you could even put together this plan. Who was it that presented her the conditions for *the most delicious way to consume Shiroyama Kyousuke* and thus held back the Queen’s desire as long as possible?”
He had wondered about that.
Especially when it came to the initial meeting at the Meinokawa Shrine before encountering Olivia. If the Queen *had been unable to hold back* and immediately devoured Kyousuke, his fate would have been sealed there.
Also, why had Olivia of Bridesmaid made an appearance now? And why had Doctor S ended his contract with her on a whim and traded her for a different vessel?
Consider them each in turn and the answer was obvious.

Doctor S had followed a plan to entertain the White Queen while actually working to support Kyousuke's plan.
"I see, I see, I see," said Kyousuke. "So you made sure to maintain a position where you could smugly say 'just as planned' no matter who won. *You* really are a thrill-obsessed freak, Mr. Wait-and-See. Now, it is true I might not have been able to get this far without your assistance."
"Right?"
"Defeating the Queen without borrowing the Queen's power. That incredible achievement might not have been possible for anyone."
"Anyone with half a brain would reach the same conclusion."
"However."
Shiroyama Kyousuke marked a dividing line with that word.
Was that chilling voice something one should never direct toward their parent? Or was it something he could use specifically because this man was his father?
"*That doesn't mean I'm just going to wipe the slate clean.* You don't get to just forget everything you did here in Houbi Village, Doctor S."
That man definitely smiled behind his medical inhaler.
He had to know he was on the losing side. He had to know what fate awaited him from the moment he chose fight over flight.
Both of them pulled the pin from an Incense Grenade and threw it.
The two explosives collided at the midpoint like they were making a toast and the Artificial Sacred Grounds expanded simultaneously.
It did not take even ten minutes to settle everything.

Facts

- A Material summoned some way other than the Blood-Sign method will be temporarily restrained by the scattering incense of an Incense Grenade. However, this does not apply in all cases.
- The White Queen changed the rules when she defeated all of the Unexplored-class and began dragging them around. Thus, the ancient methods and the current methods of summoning differ.
- The official name of Kingdom F is the Flanguild Permanently Neutral Kingdom, but the White Queen was not originally needed for its founding. When all of the Unexplored-class were defeated, the past and future histories were both instantly rewritten. This essentially allowed the Queen to encroach on the kingdom's history and destabilized the very existence of the kingdom.

- The civil war was actually caused by the great discrepancy in values between those who had – for some reason or another – noticed the White Queen's distortion and those who had not.
- The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee) really did function as an exclusive nemesis created to instantly kill the White Queen. And it was proven that she can be freely accessed when Olivia Highland uses the Jewel Blood.
- As soon as the Colorless Little Girl's appearance was confirmed, humanity advanced to the Fourth Summoning Ceremony. The old strongest will not necessarily apply in the new age.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke settled things with Doctor S.

Ending X-01: Mission Accomplished, But For Whom?

“What are you going to do now, Onii-chan?”
“Good question…”

(Ending X-01 Open 07/21 11:00)
Mission Accomplished, But For Whom?

The following day arrived.
“So what happened in the end?”
That question from the black-haired shrine maiden named Meinokawa Renge showed just how tough they were.
The Bridesmaid summoners and Repliglass soldiers who had done such great damage to Houbi Village were now gone. Losers in the Blood-Sign method would enter a mindless state for at least 24 hours after receiving the same shock as seeing their god slaughtered before their eyes, but they truly had seen that when the White Queen was defeated. Bridesmaid had been entirely unable to resist, so Government had arrested them and taken them somewhere. Unless they had worshipers inside Government’s ranks, they would never escape those cells.
The real Meinokawa Aoi had been swapped out for the White Queen and she had apparently been found in the underground lake. She had been torn limb from limb and sunk to the bottom of the lake, which normally would have been more than enough to declare her dead.
However, Meinokawa Aoi was humanity’s oldest Joruri Method.
“Hey, I’m missing some of my insides. Send in more of those *scoo-ba* divers and gather every last one of them!”
Once she had been mostly reassembled, she was back up and running.
…Incidentally, it pained Renge that she could not explain what a Joruri Method was to Higan and thus could not correct her twin sister’s mistaken assumption that they had seen the right arm of a mutilated corpse that had washed up on the shore of the underground lake.
The tents and large Repliglass landing craft left by Bridesmaid had been moved aside and recovery work was already underway. All of it was fake and that cheap look may have been directly connected to their strength.
With this, the Queen-worshiping cult had collapsed.
The White Queen had stood at the center of it all, but she was gone as well.
“Phew…”
It still did not feel real to Kyousuke.
Even so, he breathed a sigh of relief for the first time in a day.

“Onii-chan.”
Then he was approached by Olivia Highland who still wore the straw hat over her double blonde braids.
That girl had broken free of her bonds at the last moment, so she had not received a psychological shock from the White Queen’s defeat.
“What are you going to do now, Onii-chan?”
“Good question…”
What would he do now that the White Queen was defeated?
He had known he would have to do it eventually, but he had never thought he would actually pull it off. Not even Kyousuke could answer that question immediately.
However.
“Even if the White Queen herself is gone, some of the scars she left on the world must remain. In that case, I might be busy cleaning all of that up.”
But not even that would last forever.
Kyousuke and the Queen had made the world like this. Those “bonds” would eventually disappear. And once that happened, Shiroyama Kyousuke might finally be able to retire from the world of the Summoning Ceremony.
Something about this world still felt wrong to him.
It was like he had a gaping hole in his chest.
Even so, he wanted to accept this result.
Accept that he had defeated the White Queen.
And a moment later…
“Oh? It might be best hold off on ending your contract with that little vessel. Don’t you think, brother?”

Facts

- The White Queen was defeated. Nevertheless, the story is not over yet.

Ending X-02: The Mental Leeway to Enjoy the World's Destruction

“Now, a question: What does it mean for me to win or lose?”
“…”

(Ending X-02 Open 07/21 11:25)
The Mental Leeway to Enjoy the World's Destruction

That sudden voice caused everything to freeze.
Kyousuke turned his head like a rusted doll and found that pure white evil standing there.
“Hello, brother☆”
“You…!!!???”
“Isn’t there something you should be concerned about far more than how I survived? It’s a much, much, muuuuuch more pressing issue.”
What was she talking about?
His attempt to completely kill the White Queen had failed. How could there be a darker despair than that?
But just as he prepared to scream without thinking, the White Queen softly placed her slender fingertip on his lips. That was enough to silence the near-crazed boy, so the gently smiling evil spoke.
“Broootherrr? Surely you aren’t going to say you don’t know what I was planning this time, right???”
“What…are…?”
“Oh, dear. Oh, dear, dear, dear! It isn’t often I get to see you when your brain isn’t functioning! But an ignorant and incompetent brother is so very cute, so this isn’t a problem at all. Well, I’ll overlook this since it’s like watching your beloved’s face just after he wakes up.”
Her smile grew to mocking laughter and she was close enough to feel the heat of her sweet breath.
“Now, brother. The outcome is not always determined by fighting, don’t you think? In fact, I am the White Queen who stands at the peak of everything! Did you really think I would be so afraid of some newcomer nemesis that I would work to eliminate her in advance? Does that really sound like something the strongest would do?”
“…”
That was true.
There was one question he could not understand.
He understood why Bridesmaid would attempt to prevent the construction of a method to kill the White Queen. But what was the White Queen’s

reason to get involved in this one? He doubted this evil would beg for her life even at the moment of her death, so would she really bother getting up for something like this?
Of course, it could always just be one of the Queen's games.
But that was the same as a self-proclaimed expert declaring a bizarre criminal's mind was simply impossible to understand. That meant abandoning all thought. He could never track down the truth like that.
"Why…?"
"Yes, yes?"
"Why are you here, Queen…?"
"I see your mind has finally started functioning again, brother."
The White Queen whispered to him from so close she was practically nestled against his chest. Everyone else was supposedly here as well, but only her voice reached him.
"Now, a question: What does it mean for me to win or lose?"
"…"
"It of course does not mean for me to let my physical strength do the talking and simply beat you up, brother. If I set my goals that low, I could have simply attacked you head-on without disguising myself as Meinokawa Aoi. Right, brother?"
She was saying that taking Meinokawa Aoi's place and approaching Kyousuke had been a way of accomplishing her own goal, not Bridesmaid's. That brought only one thing to mind.
"To earn…my trust…?"
"Correct!! My brother really is a genius once he wakes up!!"
He hated how she praised him for an answer so obvious a moron could have given it.
But she continued regardless.
"That's it, that's right, and that's correct. I, the White Queen, simply wanted a quick way to grab ahold of your trust so I could stay by your side. That was my one and only goal. Now, then. You understand where this is headed, don't you? If you say you don't, I'll just have to open up your skull to see if it's actually empty inside. Okay, my – dear – brother. What was my ultimate objective in all this!?"
"……
……It can't be."
"Approaching you disguised as Meinokawa Aoi was no more than what you could call a *practice run*." The White Queen smiled. "Since you ultimately had your doubts, I guess I can't say I earned a perfect score, but since I did successfully bind a contract with you and face the same enemy alongside you, it wasn't a failing score either. Now, brother, it's time for a review. Where did I go wrong in all this? Was it wearing the red *hakama*? Or was it too hard to distract you when Doctor S was such a lackluster decoy enemy?"
"It can't be!?"
"Then we just need an even more hopeless nemesis."

He realized she had *that look* in her eyes.
A crazed light filled her eyes, proving she believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was doing the right thing.
"It would solve everything if we have such an overwhelming nemesis that I am dragged down from my position at the peak of the peak and fall to the #2 spot or lower. After all, brother, you are opposing me because you ranked the threats to the world, concluded I was at the very top of the list, and decided you could let everything else slide until you had dealt with me, right? So if an even more hopeless nemesis showed up and attempted to destroy this world, my world, humanity, and all the Materials, you would be forced to temporarily join forces with me, wouldn't you?"
"…That's not possible."
Shiroyama Kyousuke's thoughts turned toward the Unexplored-class he himself had embedded in the world.
And he shook his head.
He had already failed once with the White Queen. If that chaos repeated itself again, it would no longer be an accident. It would prove that Shiroyama Kyousuke was a grim reaper for the world. That was the fear that inspired him to speak.
"That won't happen! She is…The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee) is an Unexplored-class thoroughly tuned to kill only you. She's too specialized to withstand normal combat. She would lose like normal if she fought any other Unexplored-class!!"
Of course she worked that way.
Creating a Material and embedding it in the world meant that anyone could summon it if they met the conditions. Even if the conditions for the vessel were quite delicate, this would all be meaningless if she could be used for something other than killing the White Queen.
And yet…
"Oh? What an odd thing to say, brother."
Had there been an oversight in his reasoning?
Had he embedded a wrong answer in the world?
As sweat poured down not just the boy's face but his entire body, the White Queen continued nestling up against him with a wicked crescent moon smile on her face.
"In the Third Summoning Ceremony, I defeated the rest of the Unexplored-class and made all the laws of the world my allies. And the true arrival of the Fourth Summoning Ceremony was signaled by my defeat. That means it has all been literally swapped out. But was she really ready for that? Not you, but that girl."
And she said it.
"Even if she was perfectly safe to begin with, did you not think that her logical design would be altered for the worse when *I let her* defeat me? Yes,

it must have been an incredible shock to that insolent Colorless Little Girl when *I let her* test out her full power on me and even *let her* kill me."

Facts

- In the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony, the loser receives a shock equivalent to seeing their god slaughtered before their eyes.
- Based on the Three and the White Queen, the high-level Unexplored-class Materials seem to have a "heart" capable of communication.
- The defeat of the White Queen threatens to tear into the souls of not just humans but Materials as well.
- Even as The Colorless Little Girl Dedicated to a Single Goal (aie – a – oio – ei – ueo – ioa – e – uai – ee) achieved success, her internal structure was damaged.
- And the world faces a new stage and a new threat: the Fourth Summoning Ceremony.

Afterword

“……”
“……”

(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)
Afterword

This is Kamachi Kazuma!!
Blood-Sign has reached a total of 7 volumes. This time, I focused on the Meinokawa Shrine which was mentioned in Volume 1 and Kyousuke carried out the special Summoning Ceremony to kill the White Queen.
The vessel, the Unexplored-class, and the ceremonial ground. By gathering a premium version of each, you can make a special super summon! That was my original idea, but even if making each step difficult would make it all seem more impressive, I didn’t want to “forcibly” drag this out. I mean, going the standard route wouldn’t be like the Queen at all! …So I rearranged the story. I sped up the pace of the story and tried to make sure there was never a time to catch your breath.
You saw the result.
I think there are a variety of choices you can make when coming up with a strongest being. At the very least, they have to have more cards in their deck than a normal person. But I think the biggest card is the ability to “reject” the enemy’s attacks. And in a strongest story, I think you’ve reached a real turning point when that “rejection” is used not just for show but as a serious trump card. When you saw the White Queen’s unwavering character while she remained unfazed despite having everything of hers so perfectly cast aside, I hope you felt how powerful she is and how that is an abnormal decision that Shiroyama Kyousuke could not make since he still has to rely on others.

Doctor S may have made some of you think of Shigara Masami, but his true identity was simply Kyousuke’s biological father. He is motivated by phobia, not philia. A connection between Doctor S and Akura Taisaku was pointed out, but does anyone actually remember that Akura had serious cyberphobia? I hope you could imagine how they might have actually gotten along quite well.

This story contains a worldview where the rules do the talking, so I demonstrated that even the strongest being will die when they die.
And on top of that, I think the most important point is how Kyousuke felt a hole in his chest after seeing the White Queen defeated. He knows she is an

enemy he must eventually defeat, but he still felt a shock when she was defeated. In a way, the White Queen is still an absolute being to him, so he may never have been able to imagine the instant of her fall.
If you read even deeper into that, you could conclude that Shiroyama Kyousuke is the one who holds the most beautiful mental image of the White Queen. He is motivated by philia, not phobia. A girl in love might want to work extra hard to remain the strongest for Kyousuke, but this time, I had it go the other way. I think the White Queen's greatest strength is that she does not hesitate to throw everything else out if it will allow her love to be realistically fulfilled.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Miyazaki-san, and Anan-san. Unlike the usual near-future Toy Dream setting, this was set at nature-filled Houbi Village, which must have given things an entirely different atmosphere. Sorry for making things so difficult for you.
And I give my thanks to the readers. The White Queen's love will not end, even if she loses and falls from her position as the strongest. Kyousuke adheres to the strongest while the Queen is willing to throw it out for her love. Now, which one do you sympathize with more?

And I will end this here.

Make sure not to overlook that the Queen was willing to remove her own head to continue her impressive performance.
-Kamachi Kazuma

?

“Hee hee.”
“Ee hee hee hee hee.”
“Ah ha ha ha

“Bro – ther – you – iiiiiidiot☆”

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 07

Author: **Kamachi Kazuma** (□□ □□)
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The Unexplored Summon://Blood-Sign

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